

January 30, 2024

ATTN Rick Saltzberg, DRI Coordinator
ATTN Lucy Morrison, DRI Administrator
Martha's Vineyard Commission
info@mvcommission.org

Re: DRI#751 Vineyard Montessori School Expansion - Letter of Opposition

Dear Mr. Saltzberg, Ms. Morrison & MV Commission members,

We are property owners whose lot abuts the Montessori school and like many of our neighbors, we have major concerns with the expansion proposal. We believe the plan not only disregards neighborhood interests but environmental issues and building constraints as well, and that it will ultimately *overburden* an already stressed area and neighborhood. As a longtime island resident, with a family history of over 50 years of ownership of the property the school sits on, I am very familiar with the area and have witnessed its changes over time. My grandfather, Thomas Rabbitt, Sr., was a long-time VH selectman who owned and operated the Tashmoo Inn on the site from 1923 until 1970. It was destroyed by arson in 1958 when I was 10 years old and a smaller structure, the Sandpiper Restaurant was built in its place about a year later. In 1970, my grandfather sold the property to his son, my uncle, who ran it throughout the 70s. Back then, the property incorporated much more area than it does now, including six cottages on N. William St., tennis courts and four acres of land and the businesses only operated in the summer season. The school now sits on just a fraction of that area and from what we understand, was initially approved for a small nursery school. The area, being situated in a completely residential zone, was never meant to handle a heavy traffic imprint for extended periods of time. We feel the size of the building to be constructed is out of scale for the lot size and its proposed location is situated too close to a poorly mitigated slope in the landscape, as well as to our house. Drainage problems, sewer implications, privacy issues and deforestation are just some of the concerns we have with this expansion, and we believe it will have a negative impact on the neighborhood and the land surrounding the school.

Looking at the permit design, the edge of the proposed building site appears to be just a little over 20' or so from the property line meaning it will be *extremely close* to our back door. And from our perspective, due to the slope of land leading down to our backyard from their site, the wall of the entire building will tower much higher than 35 feet behind us (since it sits high on a hill and has a walk-out level). We will also be seriously impacted by the noise of construction and the subsequent daily activities once completed, as their back doors will be very close to our back door. We're concerned this will affect the peace of our property and also have a permanent, negative effect on home values. Currently, we already suffer from lack of privacy. Those in the pickup lane at the school can easily see into all our windows on that side of the house and the proposed building will sit even closer, necessitating the closing of the shades for much of the day.

Another major concern, and one that we have relayed to the school on several occasions, has to do with flooding and drainage coming from their land. Head of school Deborah Jernegan has mentioned that they were planning to mitigate these water issues possibly with dry wells and swales, however nothing has happened yet and we have not heard back as to a plan of action. As shown in the three video tapes submitted to you, in a heavy rainstorm the water overflows every basement window well that faces the school side. We ask the commission to please view the tapes if you have not yet done so, so you might see why we are desperate to know if this mitigation will be happening for certain (and when). The drainage problem was made even worse last April, 2023 when I awoke in the morning after working an evening shift (I work as an RN) to the sounds of

machinery **clear-cutting** the heavily forested land that lies between us. They removed almost every shrub, bush, and tree, save one of their trees, about 13 feet from our house. Now it is just a large dirt area sprouting weeds. Keep in mind this was a rather dense area of forestry. We have been advised that the slope and elevation of the land leading from the existing school building is likely having a large impact on the water flowing into our basement after heavy rainfalls, especially now that there are no trees or landscaping to help reduce runoff. We invite you to make a site visit to our property. Below are pictures of the forest behind our house (some are prior to our construction) before the clearing (first row) and then after (second row):



We realize that the area cleared was not our land, but we had no warning, nor any courteous communication from the school about it. Sadly, it is a very similar story to that of the Petersons and unfortunately in line with the many other letters written in and examples cited. We agree that there has been a lack of sensitivity and transparency. Personally, we have tried to engage in meaningful, respectful and open dialogue on several occasions regarding the water drainage concerns, but to no avail.

As their immediate backyard neighbors, we feel these points along with the concerns of many of our neighbors, warrant serious reconsideration and alterations to the proposed plan and that it should not pass in its current state. We understand the Dover Amendment exempts religious and educational institutions from local zoning ordinances, but if we're not mistaken it does not completely exempt them from local regulation of certain issues such as bulk and height of structures, setbacks, parking and building footprints. We truly hope the commission will enforce stricter requirements for this or any expansion project slated for this site.

Please know having had many teachers in our family, including my father who taught at the MVHS, that we are very much *pro-education*. I even sat on the Montessori Board for five years while a family member attended the school, so our family knows the positive benefits of their existence and work, and we do not argue this

point. We absolutely appreciate the school and realize its value, however, the lack of educational services on the island should not be conflated with the issue at hand - which is the inappropriate expansion plan in an already stressed landscape and community. They are separate issues. One can be pro-education as well as be pro-responsible, purposeful growth. We ask the commissioners to please consider the safety, harmony and protection of this historic island area, and to conclude that the impact and continued burden of this project on the neighborhood will be ***much too great***. We truly believe it has reached a level that does not lend itself easily to further expansion. We thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jayne and Carl Stanek