



Vineyard Conservation Society

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

August 20, 2020

Re: DRI Checklist Revision Version 14

Dear Commissioners,

The Vineyard Conservation Society (VCS) is a local, member-supported non-profit land conservation and environmental advocacy organization working since 1965 to preserve the natural resources and unique character of the Island. We wish to offer our enthusiastic support for the most recent DRI checklist revision, in particular those elements that would lower the thresholds for review of a proposal.

As you are well aware, development continues at a rapid pace on Martha's Vineyard. As we approach build-out in coming years, stewarding the fate of our remaining open space is of utmost importance. The role of VCS is to advocate for the protection of the Island's natural resources: the clean air and water, intact habitats, and functional ecological communities that define Martha's Vineyard. However, we also recognize that due to our growing population and economic concerns some portion of the island's remaining open space will necessarily be lost to development. In a climate where dwindling resources must satisfy competing and growing demands, it is vital that local leaders thoughtfully consider how any future development will balance the need for affordable year-round housing, the importance of second homes and vacation rentals to the tax base, sustainable business growth, impacts on traffic, schools, and quality of life, and more.

That crucial leadership is most effectively expressed by the Martha's Vineyard Commission. In its planning role, the Commission has described well the challenges we face, and presented a vision for a sustainable future. However, **it is only through exercising the regulatory tools granted by the Commonwealth that this vision may be realized.** The review of Developments of Regional Impact is one of just two principal tools available to the Commission, and as such must be preserved and strengthened. VCS believes that better outcomes would derive from more frequent use of the DRI process; in practice, though, as the number of buildable lots (and their average acreage) declines, thresholds for review must be lowered just to maintain a status quo level of DRI review.

Facing the challenge of overly rapid and inappropriate development on Martha's Vineyard is daunting. Because of its Island-wide perspective and state-granted legal authority, the MV Commission is best positioned among the island's governmental bodies to use the power of regulation to guide

development proposals toward better outcomes. Judicious use of the DRI process in a muscular but reasonable way is essential if the Commission is to be successful in pursuit of its vital mandate:

. . . to further protect the health, safety and general welfare of island residents and visitors by preserving and conserving for the enjoyment of present and future generations the unique natural, historical, ecological, scientific, and cultural values of Martha's Vineyard which contribute to public enjoyment, inspiration and scientific study, by protecting these values from development and uses which would impair them, and by promoting the enhancement of sound local economies.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Houser
Communications/Ecologist

Brendan O'Neill
Executive Director