

May 28, 2008

To: The Martha's Vineyard Commission foley@mvcommission.org
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Re: Support for Bradley Square

For the past three months a development proposal for "Bradley Square" on the corner of Masonic and Dukes County Avenues and adjacent to the "Arts District" in Oak Bluffs has been before the Martha's Vineyard Commission as a Development of Regional Impact. The proposal, submitted as part of a joint venture between the Island Housing Trust and the Island Affordable Housing Fund, is characterized by a combination of incredible goals: affordable housing, historic preservation, and support for local artisans.

Prior to it's submission to the M.V.C., the program defining the Bradley Square project had been the subject of six months of thoughtful work developed by the Bradley Square Design Committee, a group of individuals representing a cross section of interested parties, neighbors and planning professionals.

As an involved observer to the planning process, and now the review process, I have been energized by the development concept as well as astonished by its apparent opposition.

In conversations with friends, I find on the other side of the fence, I have offered what seems so clear to me: 1.) the developer is the "Housing Trust" in conjunction with the "Housing Fund". These two organizations have a positive track record in making Martha's Vineyard a better place, 2.) This proposal has been part of an Island wide collaborative effort that has included Habitat for Humanity, the N.A.A.C.P., the Oak Bluffs Historic Commission, and the Martha's Vineyard Museum, 3.) The Bradley Memorial Church, a significant piece of Martha's Vineyard's cultural history will be preserved and avoid inevitable demolition, 4.) The integration of affordable housing and four live/work artisan studios are prime examples of smart and sustainable growth in developing a year round community and economy, 5.) The re-vitalization of a neighborhood that has lost much of its character over the last 40 years.

Although most of the opposition seems to agree with the conceptual benefits of the Bradley Square proposal, I have been reminded of the project's "problems": 1.) Building scale – the two newly proposed buildings planned for the property are too big for the neighborhood, 2.) Parking – the neighborhood lacks parking during the summer "Art Strolls" (three hour gatherings, sponsored by the "Art's District", when artist's open their studio spaces and display their work). Therefore, an increased Art's District along with additional housing will undoubtedly increase the parking "problem".

Although I respect the opposition's point of view, I believe a temporary lack of parking, which is consistent with summer events across the Island, is more of an inconvenience than a "problem". I would also suggest the architectural merits of this project, including building scale, should be more part of a subjective debate rather than mislabeled as something much worse.

Documented Island "problems" include a lack of affordable housing, demolition of historic and aged Island buildings and a dwindling year round Island economy due to the departure of certain small business types. In order to maintain a healthy and sustainable Island wide environment, these "problems" need our attention. With Bradley Square, the Island Housing Trust and the Island Affordable Housing Fund have proposed a creative and visionary model for similar opportunities in the future. The project's capacity to problem solve far out weighs its potential for random inconvenience. Yet the proposal, as well as its authors, has been chastised, by some of the opposition, for not being thoughtful enough. I invite anyone who questions the integrity of these two organizations to visit their websites or speak with those who they have helped.

Bradley Square deserves our support. We should applaud those who have offered it to us. Otherwise, we can consider ourselves part of a bigger "problem".

Phil Regan
Oak Bluffs