

TOWN OF TISBURY

BUILDING INSPECTION & ZONING ENFORCEMENT
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Martha's Vineyard Commission
Attn: Alex Alvin
33 New York Avenue
Oak Bluffs, MA 02557

August 4, 2022

RE: 1133 Main Street Demolition DRI

Hi Alex,

I am following up on my email to you and Adam regarding the demolition DRI for 1133 Main Street in Tisbury. As you may recall, I was a bit dismayed to see Tisbury town agencies mentioned in the MV Times article discussing this application. While I understand you were simply stating that you have no record of Tisbury town agencies indicating there are safety issues with the structure, but I do not believe anyone from the Commission contacted Tisbury officials to see if there were indeed safety issues with the structure. I don't mean to make an issue of this, but I just don't want the Commission to misconstrue this statement as an indication that Tisbury officials, and specifically the Building Department were consulted regarding this property or provided any information regarding issues that may or may not be occurring with the structure.

I generally do not get involved in matters before the Commission or express an opinion about a project, outside of doing referrals, providing zoning information, or submitting records when requested. Going forward, I hope we can engage earlier to ensure you have all the information we may have to assist the Commission in their decisions. What ultimately bothered me the most about your statement was its juxtaposition to the findings of the engineer reviewing the project, and that left me with the impression that it was being used to refute the engineer's findings. I thought maybe this was just how the paper characterized the presentation, but I found the same juxtaposition in the staff report posted on the MVC website.

I feel it is important to set the record straight about the role of building inspectors for this project and future projects. First, we as inspectors are not engineers or architects, or as the Building Code refers to them, registered design professionals. Registered design professionals have years of particularized training in their field, whereas building inspectors have generalized knowledge of the specific codes we enforce. In almost all cases, inspectors defer to the registered design professionals when it comes to their area of expertise and accept their conclusions as fact absent contradictory information. As a building inspector, my job is to ensure code compliance for ongoing projects subject to a building permit, and to address specific safety issues outlined in the Building Code. For structural safety matters, there must be near catastrophic failure visible from the exterior of the structure for the building official to get involved, and even then, we often engage an engineer to advise us on the state of the structure. (Example: Condemning Tisbury Stop and Shop Warehouse after observing buckling and glass breaking and about to collapse into the public road)

Aside from catastrophic failure, a building inspector's review of an existing building for safety pertains to the quantity and adequacy of means of egress components including stairs, railings, and doors, adequacy of lighting and ventilation, and ensuring components regulated by the building code are maintained in a safe, operable and sanitary condition.

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After discovering the comments regarding the Tisbury town agencies, I requested an opportunity to inspect the Bristol property so I could determine if there were safety issues on the property that I, or the Commission should be aware of. Upon entering the basement, I noticed a strong septic smell and noticed puddles on ground, evidently there had been a cast iron pipe failure recently and remediation activities were still ongoing. This prompted me to notice the variety of spliced piping throughout the basement where modern PVC piping was joined to a mixture of copper and cast iron depending on the favored material at the time of the repair. While the drainage piping in the house is operable, it is hard to describe it as safe. To remediate the sewage leak, a plaster wall was opened up, which revealed badly wet and rotten support timbers where dirt surrounding the foundation had caved into the basement and had settled around the timbers allowing them to rot almost completely out. Lastly in the basement, I noticed a variety of wiring vintages based on the different sheathing materials, all of which were tied together at various times in a multitude of junction boxes.

The remainder of the home seemed well kept with a variety of changes throughout the years showing a mixture of renovation projects throughout time. The things I noted were areas of floor buckling that appeared to be on the newer side based on the subsurface materials that were exposed, and stairs and handrails that were of inadequate width, rise, and run by current code standards. While these stair deficiencies are common in old homes, the interior railings were of low height with large openings, and the presence of small children in the home would make me lean toward calling these a safety hazard worthy of addressing.

Sincerely,



Ross P. Seavey
Building Commissioner
Zoning Enforcement Officer