



Box  
265  
Oak  
Bluffs  
MA  
02557

508 693 6119

moira@mdfarchitect.com

April 17, 2008

Martha's Vineyard Commission  
Stone Building  
Oak Bluffs MA 02557

Re: Bradley Square DRI #612

To the Commissioners:

My hope for the MV Commission is that we can have an open discussion, maintain a vision for the next 100 years of the Vineyard and find the best solution for this project.

1. Copeland Plan -- vision for the future

The original town layout with long narrow lots worked well for many reasons and that division of land still works well today. It's unfortunate that we don't have the vision today to see that the subdivision of land that was planned 150 years ago works better now when lots and houses are not affordable to most people. The creation of three larger lots in order to support three larger buildings is a decision that hopefully can be reversed. The original division of this land had two lots facing Dukes County Ave, one lot that contains the Denniston Building, and two more lots facing Masonic Ave. Is there any reason why these lot lines shouldn't be maintained? Smaller buildings that would fit into the scale of the neighborhood could be created that would still allow for a reasonable number of affordable units, would create more green space, and allow more trees to be saved.

2. Site / Building Organization

The scale of the current proposal is extremely large when placed in the context of the existing neighborhood. While three story buildings might work if they are 16 – 18 feet wide – they become overwhelming when they are 40' x 48' blocks. If the center section of the two square buildings could be eliminated thereby creating four similar or mirror-image buildings that are 16'-18' wide x 36' to 40' long – the overall scale would be substantially reduced. Two buildings could face Dukes County Ave with a 'gallery' courtyard space between them. The other two buildings could face Masonic Ave and be either completely residential (in the R-1 zone) or mixed use. Creating buildings is as much about creating the spaces between the buildings as the structure itself. Living on the Vineyard is as much about living outside as it is about (making a) living inside. There is no intermediary (personal/private) exterior space for the residents. Porches are a key element in Oak Bluffs houses and there are no porches in this proposal.

3. Living over the Store not in the store

Living over the store is a concept which has worked since the first towns were created. Having shops or retail space at the street level facing Dukes County makes sense, however, living in the retail space may not be desirable in the long term.

The proposed live/work studios at the first floor level afford no privacy and no real separation of private and public space. Perhaps it would work better if the retail spaces were only that and the residential spaces were on the upper floor(s). Also, if the retail spaces were sold at market rate it would make these spaces more viable in the future as this business district develops. We should also be careful about designating a business area for a single type of business whether it's art or t-shirts or ice cream we know that having a variety of shops, cafes and services available is what creates a lively destination place that will service the year-round population as opposed to a strip of seasonal businesses which are closed most of the year and cater to a limited segment of people.

#### 4. Historic Restoration vs. Renovation

The Denniston building should indeed be renovated, but the expense of moving and expanding it seems illogical and is not in line with Historic Preservation guidelines. It is no longer an historic restoration when a building is moved, parts are removed, a piece is added, the sunporch is enclosed for an exit stair, two-thirds of the roof are removed and reconfigured and the second floor is gutted with nothing of the original interior remaining. Kept in its existing location, the proposed commercial spaces would be in the (possibly expanded) B-1 district. The second floor could be made into one 2 or 3 bedroom apartment eliminating the need for a second exit stair and the addition to the west. The overall cost of renovation would be reduced. In addition, if the main space could be slated for a lower impact use – a gallery, gathering space or yoga studio which would possibly draw more pedestrians than cars and therefore eliminate the negative impact of providing for 40 - 80 cars for large catered events.

#### 5. Parking / Runoff / Paving

Adding a service road and covering a very large area with asphalt or gravel to accommodate only 6 parking spaces seems to be the least efficient use of space when there are many other alternatives. With some reconfiguration of the buildings on the site, it would be possible to have off-street parking perpendicular to Masonic Ave, allowing the rest of the site to remain green space for the residents. Less paving = less runoff.

#### 6. Affordable Housing – Residential Units

If the buildings were reduced in scale as mentioned it would allow for eight one-bedroom units in the four new buildings; one 3 bedroom in the Denniston building and potentially four market rate retail spaces. Alternatively the two buildings facing Dukes County Ave could have two market rate retail spaces and four one-bedroom units while the two buildings facing Masonic Ave. could each have two 2-bedroom units or a combination of 1- and 2-bedroom units. Splitting the buildings allows each to be built under the one- and two-family building code as opposed to the commercial code, which should be a cost savings.

The 'affordable' aspect of this proposal has been confounding to many people. Spending \$5 million for 12 units of housing is an average of more than \$416,000 per unit. It is curious why this project would not be put out to bid to try to achieve the best price possible. Why not consider reducing the built area thereby reducing the overall price as well?

Is it not in the charter of the various housing groups associated with this project that the applicants be chosen through a lottery process? How is it possible that the majority of apartments already have qualified applicants before it is built?

Commissioners: please consider carefully all aspects of the Bradley Square proposal. This project will set a precedent for all future development not only on Dukes County Ave, but also for affordable housing throughout the town. Do we really want the face of Dukes County Ave to change to solid blocks of three story buildings?

Sincerely,



Moira D. Fitzgerald

