

DRI #706  
371 Indian Hill Road

1/25/22

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing to oppose the demolition of the Captain Edwin Luce house. I am a lifelong resident of West Tisbury.

As a carpenter for the last 35 years, I have worked on multiple old island houses. For ten of these years, I worked with Rick Anderson dismantling antique house and barn frames from around New England and re-constructing these on-island, including the new Agricultural Hall and the livestock barn at MVAS property in West Tisbury, and several houses in West Tisbury and Chilmark. It was on a trip to South Deerfield, MA to fetch a tobacco barn for MVAS that I found my own house- a small 1850 cape that had been the train station master's house in that town, slated for demolition by the owners at that time. In 2001, I reconstructed this house on an affordable resident homesite I was eligible to purchase. It has all the amenities- wiring, plumbing, insulation etc to meet all modern building codes. It can be done.

I have reviewed all of the materials accompanying this application, and watched the two public hearings recorded via zoom. I was extremely disappointed not to see a more robust discussion by MVC commissioners of relevant issues associated with this project- I heard only two pertinent questions about the project itself- one asking for a cost comparison of renovation/addition vs teardown and rebuild, the other asking about reducing the size/mass of the proposed new structure. Instead, much was made of the purported lack of visibility from a public way, the applicants' long tenure of this property and their recent clearing of woodland to restore historic stone walls and meadows. Reducing the size and mass is an important point; the existing assemblage of main house, guest house and studio break up the ~5,000 square feet of living space (comparable to the proposed square footage of new construction) on this landscape.

This house is visible from Indian Hill Road for 8 months of the year. Recent clearing by the applicant has maximized water views for the proposed house site and will make the new house even more visible from Obed Daggett Road. While technically a privately maintained road, Obed Daggett Road is a heavily traveled way with people coming year round from all over the island to visit Cedar Tree Neck Sanctuary, one of the most highly visited of all properties owned by Sheriff's Meadow Foundation.

Both the applicant and their architect minimized the importance of the 1986 MACRIS listing of this historic house, characterizing this as having been done by 'a small team without a great deal of knowledge of all the changes that had taken place'. To the contrary, this small team was our own local historical commission (Jill Bouck, Dick Burt and Leonard Athearn), all with extensive knowledge of local architecture and history, and of this house in particular. With personal knowledge of the extent of the 1948 renovation, these commissioners wrote in their submission to MACRIS 'The Captain

Edwin Luce house is an exceptionally fine example of the greek revival style so common in town during the mid 19th century'. I see this sentence as a tribute to the respect accorded to maintaining and enhancing this historic house during the 1948 renovation.

My grandfather, Percy Burt, was mentioned by the applicants as someone who was very involved with the 1948 renovation, but my great grandmother's highly detailed daily journals indicate otherwise. In March, 1948, Percy planned to buy the Berry estate, but stepped aside several weeks later when Dick Berry came to the island to purchase it from his family, after 40 years of non-habitation and neglect by same. There is no further mention of my grandfather being involved with this property. That same year, he bought the Harry West farm on Music Street where he renovated the 1739 house and lived there for ten years with his family. Multiple similar renovation projects both preceded and followed this one. Grandpa never met an old house he didn't fix up.

What is evident in all the letters you have received in opposition to this proposed demolition is an enormous collective fatigue with this incremental and cumulative teardown of what makes the island uniquely the island. MVC enabling legislation purpose statement ends as follows '...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' (bold emphasis mine). This house is an important part of our collective and unique architectural heritage on the island. Getting crunched into dumpsters for incineration at SEMASS should not be its fate.

Prudy Burt

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