

To The Martha's Vineyard Commission:

Tisbury is a wonderful and unique town. In fact, it is so unique, the town apparently does not need to follow the proper local government channels that other towns in the state deem necessary. Therefore, I wouldn't waste much time on this special way's nomination. The Tisbury planning board and its former chairmen have it all figured out. Any questions, thoughts or concerns by commissioners or anyone else share the same status as this public hearing - irrelevance. Tisbury's planning board held its public hearings, approved the language, and sent the nomination to the town meeting floor last month. It was overwhelmingly passed by the townspeople. There was no need for any further, time-consuming opinions at public hearings. This was a clear and obvious leapfrog in the DCPC step by step process. I will not be convinced that this was not willful and knowing. Actions such as these sow deep seeds of distrust in government at the local level. As such, they should not be tolerated.

I am upset at this situation, but not for the reasons you might think. I have only a couple of small issues with the nomination as currently written and I actually support the merits of it. If we can continue to access our properties and maintain the underground utilities, the situation on my property will remain positive and unchanged. I am upset at the fact that by merely bringing this procedural misstep to light, in some corners, I will be cast as some sort of anti-conservation/anti-historical procedural watchdog. Quite the contrary, this could not be further from the truth. The property on which my family and I have lived for the last 17 years is located at the crossroads of these two ways. I have worked extremely hard to minimize the impact on the natural environment around my home and complied with the development guidelines long before they were put forth in a nomination for protection.

For what it is worth, I do wonder why gates obstructing the roads are grandfathered. This runs completely contrary to the West Tisbury's language involving these same roads. Also, it would be nice to have the town contribute to the few thousand dollars a year that my neighbors and I pay in road maintenance.

Mostly, I wanted to have the chance to convey what I see as an inequity; not in just this special way nomination, but nominations of the past and future. I am of the belief that these 20' conservation restrictions should be divided into two parts. The dirt road itself and the vegetative area, 6 and 14 feet, respectively. The dirt road provides many important things but is not where my issue lies. The approximately 14-foot vegetative area, more than 2/3's of the conservation restriction, is where I believe the inequity occurs. Red Coat Hill Road and Shubael Weeks Path wind through town lines and properties, boundaries of which are indiscernible, all part of a maturing New England forest. Land that is worthy of our attention and protection.

So, let's protect it together. We should extend the same property tax status to this 14-foot stretch of woodland as we reward any other piece of conservation land. Much of Red Coat Hill Road and portions of Shubael Weeks already receive this status. With the adoption of this nomination, private landowners will be responsible for property taxes on land they cannot utilize. Let's make the cost of protecting this and other nominations, future property tax revenue. We all benefit from conservation. Therefore, I believe we need to level the playing field and spread the cost of this valued conservation among the entire community, not just a handful of property owners.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Stephen Kelly