

Dear MVC Commissioners,

April 1, 2016

I want the SHA homeowners to have access to their homes and I think the town of Chilmark's plan to relocate the parking lot is a good one. But building a bridge in this location is a bad idea. Here are my six reasons why:

1. Rather than rely on the opinions of paid engineers and architects, the MVC ought to be thinking about how we can be stewards of the island. The MVC should get its information from reliable sources such as the Vineyard Conservation Society and the former chair of the MVC, Chris Murphy (a fisherman who knows the changing nature of shores). Both the VCS and Mr. Murphy believe that this is the wrong solution. So please, do not be taken in by sales pitches from people who make their living engineering hard solutions. The MVC has the opportunity to be a leader and to show others how to properly care for this island—for our children, their children and beyond!

2. I attended several of the Squibnocket Committee meetings and was saddened to see this issue framed as one neighborhood vs. another. I am from neither neighborhood. I have the perspective of a man who got married on that beach, loves it, surfs along it, and walks it often. The sight of a bridge towering above families enjoying the beach will radically change the idyllic and natural surrounds.

3. As an onlooker to the meetings, I couldn't understand why the SHA folks (with their bridge solution) were held up in great regard, while the "other side" (with their idea for a soft solution) was shunned. From day one the SHA has proven that they really don't care what the town wants. At the first meeting I attended, very early in the process, the SHA attorney said, "My clients want a bridge and will settle for nothing else." Yes the SHA folks dangled more beach as a carrot to earn them more "yes" votes but they have never wavered from their vision. Rather than creating a model of a bridge at grade, the SHA simply sent us a "new" version of the bridge that got voted down at town meeting.

4. I think the MVC is in a very powerful position and can lead island towns towards true managed retreat strategies. At your recent public hearing, each of the people that spoke on behalf of the SHA mentioned "not fighting mother nature" and "managed retreat". However, if you look up managed retreat you will see that it means abandoning their bridge project:

"to improve coastal stability, essentially replacing artificial 'hard' coastal defences with natural 'soft' coastal landforms." And furthermore, "There are no direct costs apart from that of removing any defences already in place and maintenance costs are very low. Sediment flow is also restored to its natural state, beaches can be naturally replenished due to erosion of the coast, providing protection and the balance of the coastline returns." Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Managed_retreat

Both sides agree that the sea is rising quickly and the revetments need to be removed—so simply do that and then see what happens. Try the dune road for a year or two and see how it works. If it is washed out for a day or two and there is an emergency situation, houses can be accessed via 4x4 on the beach, via Aquinnah.

5. In my opinion, soft solutions have not been seriously considered. For example, when Mark Haley commented on soft solutions, he chose to only discuss coir logs, which have been widely known to fail both at Squibnocket and Wasque. He was only talking about soft solutions as armoring, not as a roadway.

He didn't talk about a true soft solution like the migrating dune road that has existed at Squibnocket as long as anyone can remember. He didn't say that a soft solution wouldn't work. He said it'd be difficult.

I believe that there are many other options for the road but that the engineers are simply responding to the will of their client. As Mark Haley said, "We can build anything." and that is what they get paid to do—build, engineer, design—precisely the opposite of managed retreat.

6. The notion that the town is somehow obligated to help provide the SHA with access is incorrect. Attached are the Minutes and public town records for the Squibnocket Farms subdivision. There is a lot here but when you get down to the bottom of page 57 and the top of page 58 you will find powerful and clear language that went into their subdivision deeds:

"Recognizing that the land depicted on the Squibnocket Ridge subdivision plan is situated in a unique and remote location, the access to which is subject to periodic disruption and destruction by natural forces, every owner of a lot in the above-described subdivision shall be deemed to have covenanted with the Town of Chilmark that such owner releases and holds harmless said town, its agents and servants from any liability resulting from inaccessibility of said lot due to impassibility of the roadway servicing Squibnocket Ridge."

So how exactly did we get from this language to ensuring that they build a bridge strong enough to allow 40-ton vehicles?

In closing, **I'd like to thank you all for your service. You have a hard job.**

Gratefully yours,

Thomas Bena
Chilmark