

To: The Martha's Vineyard Commission
From: Wendy Weldon and Leanne Cowley, co-chairs Squibnocket Pond
District Advisory Committee
Re: Public Hearing, March 24, 2016, Squibnocket Parking Lot Relocation
and Squibnocket Causeway

March 15 2016

From Wendy Weldon and Leanne Cowley, co-chairs Squibnocket Pond District
Advisory Committee

The Squibnocket Pond District Advisory Committee previously submitted concerns and considerations about the Squibnocket Beach and Squibnocket Farms access projects to the Town Committee on Squibnocket in the summer of 2014 (see attached document). At this point in the process, we, Wendy Weldon and Leanne Cowley, co-chairs of the Squibnocket Pond District Advisory Committee would like to revisit those considerations and submit new concerns. Please be advised that we are not speaking for the Squibnocket Pond District Advisory Committee as a whole, but speak as individual members of the advisory committee and as stewards of the pond.

We preface our remarks by noting that, in our opinion the proposed parking lot and road plans are very successful compromises, compared with the original proposals. This was due to the hard work of many: the Squibnocket Project Committee, the engineers, the planners and many concerned individuals. We want to stress that we feel these plans put everyone involved in a very good place, sensible for all. They meet human needs while keeping an eye on future impacts of climate change and sea level rise, and adhere to the principle of managed retreat. We fully support the progress that has been made and the level of listening that has marked the process. Access to Squibnocket Farms is essential for the homeowners and for a possible emergency. In no way do our concerns reflect a desire to limit or restrict this access.

Here are our concerns.

The east end of the pond is the area most impacted under current development and future build out scenarios. This part of the watershed is more densely developed, and the naturally eutrophic characteristic of the pond is most pronounced here because it's the most stagnant area, with possible nitrogen input from the homes close to the water. The pond is shallower here and suffers from the least amount of mixing and flushing, since it is farthest away from the tidal input at Herring Creek.

The causeway, while a sensible solution for access to Squibnocket Farms, also is going to introduce runoff, noise and exhaust close to the pond edge, affecting not only pollutant levels in the pond but potentially affecting wildlife. We would like to see the MVC and the Town of Chilmark plan for the highest-level possible of runoff

mitigation from the at-grade causeway and from the parking lot. Catch basins and vegetated swales need to be implemented when appropriate.

The same impact concern exists for the proposed boat launch. We propose that an alternate location be considered or that the boat launch remains in the same location but with limited access. Kayakers and canoers are sufficiently served by the current walk-in near the current parking lot. A new access just for small paddling boats near the Vytlacil property may be a possibility. It was too steep for a bigger boat launch at that location but it may be appropriate for the smaller boats. A boat launch for skiffs and other motorboats at the south end of the causeway would add to traffic congestion, pollution, and noise in the increasingly-congested east end. Also, the shallow pond depth may be a consideration. Another possible location in a less congested area has been suggested. This one is located near Herring Creek in Aquinnah where the water depth is much greater and more conducive to the launching of a motorboat. This alternative has not always been well received.

What if the causeway had the Squibnocket Farms gate at the north end, thus restricting vehicle use on the causeway? This keeps the use of the causeway private as well as available for the shellfish constable and for any emergency traffic.

The shellfish constable would be permitted to use this proposed boat launch when needed to ensure that Squibnocket Pond stays open for shell fishing. The boat launch would also be available for use in an emergency situation. If in the future, the pond is used for shell fishing, then the shell fishermen could also use the causeway and the boat launch. If this launch is open to the public, we have concerns that overuse could be environmentally damaging. General public use will increase traffic on the causeway and will add to the congestion at the south end of the causeway where cars and trucks will need to turn around after dropping off or picking up their boats.

Not least of all the regional impact considerations are the visual impacts. The very fact of this structure reduces the natural and wild feel of this area of Squibnocket Pond. There are thousands of visitors to Squibnocket Beach yearly and we suggest that the presence of the causeway is going to negatively impact the human experience of the pond for all users – beachgoers, recreational paddlers, hunters, skaters, wildlife enthusiasts, and pond-side residents alike. Because of this dramatic change in the character of the Pond's east end, the visual impact must be seriously considered. The question of causeway overall height has been raised as an issue, and we urge The MVC to carefully consider whether the proposed 13 foot height is ultimately necessary. Would a 9 or 10-foot height equally achieve the goal of minimal disturbance from a wash over due to a storm impact? Would a lower height negatively affect the vulnerability and longevity of the causeway structure? The level of shading between 13 feet and 9-10 feet appears to be inconsequential from what we understand.

Further, sight lines may present a safety issue. The height and bulk of a higher causeway does not allow a person approaching the single-lane structure to see if another car might be approaching from the other side. Obviously there are no turnouts on the bridge to accommodate two cars approaching at the same time at each end. And, finally, a structure of that height will increase the impact of headlights at night, shining far across the landscape and into people's homes, creating light pollution which Chilmark normally seeks to minimize.

Squibnocket Pond has been determined by the MVC to be nitrogen-impacted (Gaines, Wilcox, and town reports), due in part to lack of flushing and in part from increasing inputs from development. This must be taken into consideration when planning more structures and human activity around the pond. We urge the MVC to plan for more mitigation of impacts in the east end than current planning demonstrates. According to Article 12 of the Town By Laws, the DCPC overlay district was formed "in order to protect the waters, tributaries, groundwater and land abutting Squibnocket Pond. The District is created with special concern for preservation of the unspoiled nature of the Pond and adjacent coastal areas, and for the fragile ecology of the area..." Article 12 further specifies that when there is a conflict between regulations, "the more restrictive shall apply." We fear that these concepts have been lost in the process at times, while forging through the many considerations and complexities surrounding the beach renovation and Squibnocket Farms access.

Thank you, Leanne Cowley and Wendy Weldon