

November 15, 2022

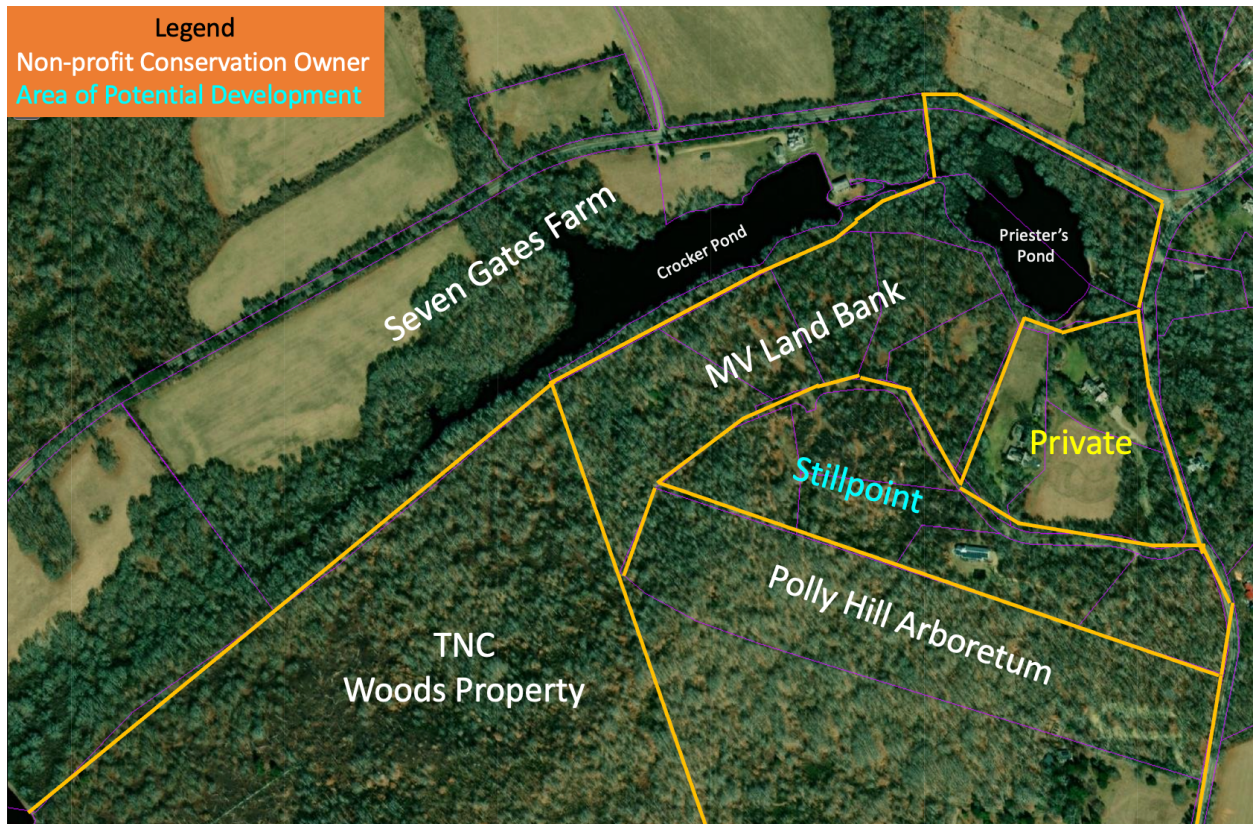
To: MV Commissioners and Alex Elvin
From: Tess Bramhall and David Foster
Subject: DRI 279-M. Stillpoint (Meadows) MV, Inc.

We are writing a second letter to expand on our previous concerns, based on new aspects of the project that emerged on November 3 and in subsequent newspaper articles.

2. The proposal is not about land conservation. It is about destroying nature.

Statements supporting the project tout its conservation benefits. In fact, this magnificent landscape has been conserved already, through public land acquisitions by the MVLB and private conservation restrictions on Polly Hill Arboretum (PHA), Seven Gates Farm, and the TNC-Woods Preserve. The public can enjoy the splendor of this landscape through MVLB and PHA lands. Nothing proposed at Stillpoint will improve the extraordinary qualities of the Mill Brook watershed. It can only undermine it.

The DRI decision will determine to what extent the natural qualities of Stillpoint will be compromised through the destruction of forest for parking lots, driveways, septic fields, a workshop, and housing. It will determine whether the existing conservation land and its undisturbed quiet will be damaged by development, noise, and activities on Stillpoint.



Stillpoint proposes to convert much of its wooded landscape into parking, driveway, a workshop, two residential structures, a new septic facility, and public well to accommodate many weekly small to large (80-100 person) events in the middle of a rural conserved landscape. This landscape has been protected at considerable private and public expense as part of long-standing town and regional planning efforts in a critical watershed and one of the island's largest intact forest areas.

2. The land is the central issue of concern.

Statements supporting this project focus on the personal qualities of the proponents and the mission of their organization. In our view, these qualities are red herrings. The central issue in front of the MVC is the island landscape and the impacts that will be allowed to alter the Stillpoint and adjoining property in the future. People and organizations are ephemeral, but the conditions established by the MVC today will guide all future land use. Legally binding restraints on those activities, not assurances and reputations, are needed to ensure an environmentally sound future for Stillpoint and the Mill Brook watershed.

3. The Stillpoint non-profit programs is a Trojan Horse for the for-profit enterprise.

The proposed project consists of two elements. One, which garners much public support, involves small-group, contemplative, educational activities organized by the staff and supporters of the non-profit. These will adhere to the Stillpoint mission and philosophy. A second set of for-profit activities will be much larger, led by unknown groups, and is unsupported by letters or testimonials. These activities will not be required to adhere to the Stillpoint mission or philosophy. The nature, frequency, scale and impact of the for-profit activities remain largely conjectural. In our view, the two elements of the proposal should be separated and thoroughly understood and evaluated.

4. Stillpoint employs a flawed comparative model in the Ag Society and Grange Hall

The applicants use the Ag Society and Grange as models for the weddings and large for-profit activities. There are deep problems with this comparison, as exhibited in the photographs below and the map above. The buildings and grounds of the Grange and Ag Society were designed as community centers to host



Stillpoint



Ag Society



Grange Hall

large events, with open grounds to support crowds, compact parking, and excellent access. Their locations were selected to accommodate the significant noise and commotion that they generate.

The Stillpoint region of West Tisbury lacks these features by design and town planning. Stillpoint supports a single secluded structure designed for private use in a rural wooded landscape. The public and non-profit conservation entities have invested heavily to keep that natural landscape intact, quiet, and peaceful and to protect the critical regional resources of expansive forest lands and the Mill Brook.

West Tisbury comprises a varied, rural community and set of landscapes. The MVC should reinforce the long-term planning and significant financial investments that seek to keep this natural landscape intact.

5. Stillpoint will parasitize public and private conservation land for its benefit.

Stillpoint has 7 acres comprising two lots (11 & 13) under consideration and 6 acres in two adjoining lots (9 & 10). All are heavily forested and attractive. The plan is to convert substantial forest area to support frequent events, with the proponents seeking to reserve the potential for future expansion.

Given the proposed conversion of a substantial portion of Stillpoint's natural area, what land will provide the setting for the nature-based, contemplative activities that are proposed by the non-profit? And, what land area will accommodate and absorb the impact of the many for-profit events of 80-100 people and even more events planned for less than 80 people?

The answer is the 24 public acres owned by MVLB and the expansive adjoining acreage of Polly Hill Arboretum that directly borders the entire south side of Stillpoint (see map above). The quality experience promised by Stillpoint will not be provided by Stillpoint lands, as these will be substantially fragmented by development, but by the public and private lands of abutters. What will constrain the spill-over and use of public land by every event at Stillpoint? What will constrain the impact of noise and trespassers from Stillpoint onto the Polly Hill Arboretum, TNC's Woods property, and Seven Gates Farm? Who will guarantee the quiet, contemplative experience of the individual public and private users of those existing conservation lands?

~ ~ ~

We have worked with Thomas Bena in the past under the promise of conserving this magnificent landscape. We plan to continue our efforts and would request that the MVC reinforce the long-term planning vision and conservation goals for this delightfully quiet and rural portion of West Tisbury and for the Stillpoint property under consideration.