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Martha's Vineyard Commission

DRI 751 Vineyard Montessori School Expansion

Staff Report – 2024-1-31

1. DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 **Owner:** Vineyard Montessori School, Inc.
- 1.2 **Applicant:** Vineyard Montessori School, Inc.
- 1.3 **Applicant's Agents:** Deborah Jernigan, Head of School & Attorney Ross Seavey
- 1.4 **Project Location:** 45 Tashmoo Avenue, Tisbury
- 1.5 **Proposal:** To erect a third educational building on the Montessori campus for 80 pupils and eight staff members and to construct an onsite wastewater treatment system
- 1.6 **Zoning:** R 10
- 1.7 **Local Permits/Reviews:** Tisbury Board of Health, Tisbury Building Department, and Tisbury Fire Department
- 1.8 **Surrounding Land Uses:** To the North, the project site abuts multiple residential properties. To the East, the project site abuts several residential properties and fronts Main Street. To the South the project site abuts a residential property and fronts Tashmoo Avenue. To the West, the project site abuts multiple residential properties.
- 1.9 **Project History:** The Vineyard Montessori School was established in 1975. In 2017 it purchased abutting land to expand its campus. A few years later it added a new building to its campus (two structures in total presently sit within the campus).
- 1.10 **Project Summary:** To erect a new educational building on the Montessori School campus with a 2,915 sqft footprint (3,381 sqft with decks and landings) to accommodate pupils from off-campus, leasehold class space and to accommodate pupils relocated from within the campus. The occupancies of the two existing buildings, satellite classroom, and one proposed building are anticipated as follows:
 - **Existing Preschool Building (286 Main Street)**
Currently: 60 preschoolers, 8 staff
2025: 30 Elementary & Middle School students, 4 staff
(Occupancy numbers in this building will decrease by 50% once preschoolers move into the new building.)
 - **Existing Toddler Building (45 Tashmoo Avenue)**
Currently: 18 Toddlers, 15 Elementary students, 8 staff
2025: 27 Toddlers, 8 staff
(Occupancy numbers in this building will decrease by 6.)
 - **Satellite classroom (15A Church Street)**
Currently: 15 Elementary & Middle School students, 2 staff
2025: This lease will be eliminated (saving the school over \$3,100/month) and these 15 students and 2 staff will relocate to the renovated building (286 Main St.) once the preschoolers move into the new building.
 - **NEW Preschool Building**

Fall 2024: 80 preschoolers, 9 staff

- Overall, there will be an increase of 29 children and 5 staff on the main campus once the project is complete.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

2.1 DRI Referral: Tisbury Board of Health

2.2 DRI Trigger: 6.1 Private Facilities: Any private Development that proposes the creation or expansion of a social, health, recreational, religious, or educational facility or other place of assembly or institutional facility with either: a. Floor Area of 3,500 sq ft or more (Mandatory Referral and MVC Review)

2.3 LUPC: Slated January 8, 2024

2.4 Public Hearing: Slated February 1, 2024

3. PLANNING CONCERNS

3.1 Wastewater

The two existing buildings on the campus have septic tanks. A third is proposed for the new building. The project site is in the Vineyard Haven Harbor/Vineyard Sound watershed (not impacted). The fixtures of the existing buildings and the proposed building are as follows:

- New Building: five toilets, 10 sinks and zero kitchens
- 45 Tashmoo Avenue five toilets, seven sinks, zero showers, zero kitchens
- 286 Main Street: three toilets, five sinks, one shower, zero kitchens

3.2 Stormwater:

- “The new building is proposed as a fully guttered building and all roof runoff will be captured,” the Applicant’s Agent writes. “Schofield, Barbini, and Hoehn are currently designing a storm water management plan which will be submitted to the MVC for approval. The Massachusetts Building Code prevents construction that would create a runoff issue to an adjacent lot, and VMS and its construction team will ensure this provision of the code, as well as all other code requirements, are met on this project.”
- Staff recommends a complete drainage plan.

3.3 Traffic and transportation

- The parking lot as currently set up only has eight identified parking spots with curb stops and all other parking is haphazard in unmarked spots. A parking plan proposes 20 standard parking spaces and one accessible parking space.
- Current Staff & Pupils:
16 staff members at the 45 Tashmoo Ave/286 Main Street campus and two staff members at 15A Church Street in Tisbury. Total: 18
93 students at the 45 Tashmoo Ave/286 Main Street campus and 15 students at 15A Church Street in Tisbury. Total: 108
- Proposed Staff & Pupils:
21 staff members at 45 Tashmoo Ave/286 Main Street campus. No longer leasing Church Street. 137 students at 45 Tashmoo Ave/286 Main Street campus.
- There are no school bus drop-offs at the Montessori School

- The designated pick up and drop off area is the access road and loop. The school uses staggered pick up and drop off times to moderate the flow of traffic in the morning and afternoon.
- Morning Drop Time Periods: 7:30am, 8:15am, and 8:30am
- Afternoon Pick Up Time Periods: 12:00pm, 2:15pm, 2:30pm, 4:00pm
- The school uses Zoom for many events for ease of parents and staff, to reduce traffic at the site during non-school hours, and to be more carbon emissions conscious.:
- Virtual School Events (Zoom):
 - New school year orientation
 - Parent-Teacher conferences (3 times/year)
 - Parent education evenings
- In-person School Events:
 - Summer picnic (5-7 pm, once a year in August)
 - Popsicles on the playground (3-4 pm, once a year in August)
 - Fun Fridays (2:30-4pm 3x/year in fall, winter & spring)
 - Special visitor days (twice a year, staggered from 9-11).
- The campus is bike and pedestrian friendly, according to the Applicant’s Agent, due to its proximity to Main Street and Franklin Street which provide sidewalk access up to Tashmoo Avenue. There is also bike rack on site.

Staff Analysis:

- **Existing Montessori School Trip Generation:** Table 1 provides a summary of the existing student population and staff at the Montessori School. Currently, the students and staff are spread out amongst three separate locations –
 1. 286 Main Street (Pre-school Building)
 2. 45 Tashmoo Avenue (Toddler Building)
 3. 15A Church Street (Satellite Classroom)

Table 1: Existing ITE Trip Generation Conditions at the Montessori School

		AM Peak Trips	PM Peak Trips
Existing Students	108	97	65
Existing Staff	18	16	11
TOTAL:	126	113	76

- During the AM Peak Hour, The Montessori School generates 113 trips while the PM Peak Hour generates 76 trips. There are no school bus drop-offs or pick-ups at the Montessori School. Drop-offs and pick-ups are conducted internally, using the access drive/loop on the property. The school uses a staggered pick-up and drop-off system to moderate the flow of traffic in the morning and afternoon to eliminate the potential of vehicle queuing and stacking out onto Tashmoo Avenue. It should be noted that this event rarely occurs if at all. Drop off times in the morning occur at 7:30am, 8:15am, and 8:30am. As seen in the time-lapse video, vehicles enter the site, loop around, and exit the site. The busiest drop off times in the morning are during the 8:15am and 8:30am windows at which only 15 to 20 cars arrive per window. For the afternoon, pick-ups occur at 12:00pm, 2:15pm, 2:30pm, and 4:00pm. The busiest

drop off times in the afternoon are during the 2:15pm and 2:30pm windows at which only 15 to 20 cars arrive per window.

- As defined in the *Institute of Transportation Engineers, *Trip Generation, 9th Edition, User's Guide*, a **trip** or **trip end** is a single or one-direction vehicle movement with either the origin or the destination (exiting or entering) inside a study site. For trip generation purposes, the total trip ends for a land use over a given period of time are the total of all trips entering plus exiting a site during a designated time period.
- **Proposed Montessori School Trip Generation:** Table 2 provides a summary of the proposed student population and staff at the Montessori School, all of which will be located on one property once consolidated-

1. 45 Tashmoo Avenue – (Pre-school, Toddler, Elementary/Middle School)

Table 2: Proposed ITE Trip Generation Conditions at the Montessori School

		AM Peak Trips	PM Peak Trips
Proposed Students	137	123	82
Proposed Staff	21	19	13
TOTAL:	158	142	95

- The proposed Montessori School will see an increased population by +32 students/staff. The student population is expected to increase by +29 students (137) and staff members will increase by +3 staff (21). During the AM Peak Hour, the proposed Montessori School is expected to generate 142 trips, an overall increase of +29 trips while the PM Peak Hour generates 95 trips, an overall increase of +19 trips from the existing condition today. There will continue to be no school bus drop-offs or pick-ups at the Montessori School. Drop-offs and pick-ups will continue to take place internally using the access drive/loop on the property. The school will continue to use a staggered pick-up and drop-off system to moderate the flow of traffic in the morning and afternoon for queuing and stacking of vehicles rarely occur.
- **Parking:** The existing parking lot at The Montessori School is quite haphazard because there are no true marked parking spaces, etc. on site. They do have 8 identified parking spots for staff with curb stops and several temporary speed bumps to reduce vehicular speeds. The proposed parking plan shows an increase of +12 total parking spaces for a total of 20 standard parking spaces, and 1 handicapped accessible space. The proposed parking plan ensures that all the school's parking needs are adequate and can be accommodated on the property. It should also be noted that emergency vehicles can safely enter, navigate through, and exit the parking lot should they need to access the property.
- The Tisbury Zoning bylaws for parking in the R-10 District of Tisbury are as follows:
 (III) For dwelling structures which do not front on a public way there shall be an additional access frontage of forty (40) feet in the R50 District and thirty (30) feet in the R10, R20, and R25 Districts; said access widths shall extend and be arranged so as to serve all dwelling structures and parking areas on the premises; and, shall be designed to accommodate emergency vehicles (e.g. fire, police, ambulance).

(c) Accessory Apartment: There shall be a minimum of one (1) parking space, not less than ten feet by twenty feet, per accessory apartment. The spaces shall be located so as to minimize the visual impact from the street or abutting properties by a minimum landscaped area setback of ten feet.

- Public parking exists along Tashmoo Avenue and Main Street in front of the Montessori School Campus. The Montessori School does not promote parking in these areas and even holds events on ZOOM, to reduce traffic and parking at the site during school and non-school hours. The applicant also supports a request from the neighborhood to make one or both sides of Tashmoo Avenue “no parking”.
- **Sight Lines:** Sight lines at the existing and proposed driveways were also analyzed. The speed limit along Tashmoo Avenue is 20 mph. The corresponding required sight distance for 20 mph is 115 feet. Sight lines are more than adequate for the posted speed limit.
- **Safety:** The accident history of the study area was evaluated to identify safety deficiencies and determine if any location experiences a higher-than-average annual accident rate. The accident data was obtained from MassDOT records for the three most recent years available (2020-2022). There were no reported accidents in the project area vicinity, of which all fell well below the state-wide average (0.57) and the District 5 average (0.57) for unsignalized intersections. Sidewalks are present along Main Street, but they do not exist along Tashmoo Avenue. The applicant is currently requesting school zone designation from the Town.
- **Recommendation/Potential Mitigation:** Staff has evaluated the proposed project and has concluded that the project will not have a negative impact on the surrounding area/neighborhood. In the event that the drop-off and pick-up windows become problematic, the applicant should consider additional times in order to reduce potential conflicts.

3.4 **Landscape and Lighting:**

- “Under the Massachusetts Building Code,” the Applicant’s Agent writes, “all egress paths in an education building, including exterior stairs, must be lit when a building is occupied. VMS ensures all lighting on the interior and exterior of their most recent building complies with this code as well as the Stretch Energy Code which requires lighting to be controlled by occupancy sensor switches. VMS will work with their electrician during the construction of this new building to review existing exterior fixtures to see if a better fixture is available that will still meet building code requirements. Regardless, all current and proposed lighting is in accordance with Tisbury zoning regulations and the proposed lighting will restrict the amount of upward-directed light, avoid glare, avoid over-lighting, utilize dimming and other appropriate lighting controls, and minimize bluish night in the nighttime environment, and be dark sky compliant.”
- Staff recommends cut sheets for all exterior lighting fixtures be provided to the Commission.

3.5 **Impact on abutters:**

- “The VMS campus totals 61,073 square feet of land,” The Applicant’s Agent writes, “the equivalent of six buildable lots in Tisbury’s R-10 zoning district. Just five buildable lots would produce a potential for 24,000 square feet of building envelope. With a 35-foot height restriction in this district, that could balloon to over 70,000 square feet of structure with 5 septic systems. I think it’s important to understand the potential impact the abutters would have faced had this land been developed as the rest of the neighborhood was. Here, VMS is proposing a total structural footprint for all buildings of +/- 7900 square feet, and a total

gross square footage of 16,104 square feet of useable space, vastly under what could otherwise exist here under Tisbury zoning.”

- “Tisbury allows educational use as an as-of-right use in the residential zoning district,” the Applicant’s Agent writes, “thus indicating that the community views residential neighborhoods as ideal places for schools and daycares. The Tisbury School and multiple daycares are located in the R-10 residential zoning district. The proposed building is fully compliant with zoning and requires no special exceptions under the Dover Act or local zoning. To say the small scale, shingle and wood clad buildings that make up the VMS campus are not in keeping with the neighborhood defies architectural logic and the Town’s own zoning.”