

Approved 9/23/26
TOWN OF WEST TISBURY
SELECT BOARD MEETING
WEDNESDAY, September 16th, 2026
Town Hall Hybrid Meeting

Present: Select Board members - Skipper Manter (Chair), Jessica Miller, and Cynthia Mitchell; Jennifer Rand (Town Administrator)

Also present in person or via Zoom: Shawn Ramoutar; Chief Greg Pachico; Melinda Loberg (MVC Representative); Lily Echeverria (Vineyard Gazette); Courteny Tau (Josh); Michael Miller.

Call to Order

Mr. Manter called the Select Board's weekly meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. He stated that all members were present, with Ms. Mitchell participating remotely.

Approval of Minutes - September 9, 2026

Ms. Miller moved to approve the September 9, 2026 minutes. Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.

Discussion: No changes were requested.

Roll Call Vote: Jessica Miller - Aye; Cynthia Mitchell - Aye; Skipper Manter - Aye.

The Motion was approved unanimously. (3-0)

Tree Planting in West Tisbury Cemeteries

Ms. Rand said the Board had received a letter from Alan Gowell, acting Cemetery Superintendent, asking that the regulations for Lambert's Cove Cemetery be amended to ban plantings. The existing regulations required the superintendent to approve plantings, and Mr. Gowell did not want the decision left to his discretion. He explained that trees became larger, impeded other grave spaces, and changed the historically open appearance of cemeteries.

Ms. Rand said that, if plantings were not banned, Mr. Gowell proposed requiring a minimum five-by-five-foot grave space for a planting, equivalent to a cremation lot. She said this would be difficult because the cemetery was not laid out so that a five-by-five-foot square could simply be purchased for a tree. Mr. Manter said the Town should not sell grave lots for planting trees. Ms. Miller agreed that doing so would waste a limited resource.

Mr. Manter said plantings should be banned in all Town cemeteries because trees and shrubs started small but grew into other lots. He said he had believed plantings had already been banned, but Ms. Rand had not found such a provision in the regulations. Mr. Manter said flowers would not concern him, but trees, shrubs, and bushes would eventually become overgrown when no one continued to care for them.

Ms. Miller asked whether the prohibition should cover all plantings or only trees and shrubs. Ms. Mitchell asked how flowers could be allowed and whether only annuals would be permitted. The Board discussed plants that died back each winter, perennials that returned without spreading, and plants such as hydrangeas that would continue growing and encroach on another grave space. Ms. Miller said she supported prohibiting shrubs and trees.

Ms. Rand suggested the Board address the immediate requests by prohibiting trees, shrubs, and bushes, and asked Mr. Gowell how another cemetery defined the annuals or perennials it allowed. She said the Board could draft a more formal policy later. The Board agreed that the immediate prohibition should apply to all West Tisbury cemeteries.

Ms. Mitchell moved to ban any planting of trees, bushes, or shrubs in the West Tisbury cemeteries.

Ms. Miller seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Jessica Miller - Aye; Cynthia Mitchell - Aye; Skipper Manter - Aye.

The Motion was approved unanimously. (3-0)

The Board agreed to return to the regulations later to define allowable plantings and revise the existing policy.

Pine Tree at Old County Road and State Road

Chief Pachico said the Fire Department considered itself the custodian of the pine tree at the intersection of Old County Road and State Road, where the Department installed the holiday lights. The tree was overgrown, looked bad at the top, and had become too tall for the Department to reach with its equipment. He said one person was willing to donate a new tree, and another was willing to remove the existing tree and plant the replacement.

Chief Pachico said the person removing the existing tree did not have equipment capable of moving it intact. He proposed offering the tree to anyone willing to pay to move it. He said this could preserve the tree rather than cutting it down, chipping it, and removing the stump. He later explained that the replacement would be the fourth tree at the location and that the existing tree was not historically significant.

Ms. Rand asked whether a tree that large could be moved. Chief Pachico said machines existed for that purpose, but none were available on the Island. Ms. Miller asked whether offering the tree would be the first step and whether it would be taken down if no one responded. Chief Pachico confirmed that the person willing to plant the new tree was also willing to remove the old tree if necessary.

Ms. Rand recommended asking both newspaper town columnists to publicize the offer and placing it on the Town website. Because the tree had value, she recommended setting a deadline for letters of interest, requiring proof of insurance and proof that the tree could be removed by a specified date, and using a lottery if more than one qualified person responded. She said a formal advertisement would be expensive and might produce no return. Ms. Rand offered to work with Chief Pachico on a deadline.

Ms. Miller moved to declare the tree at the intersection of Old County Road and State Road surplus property. Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.

***Roll Call Vote: Jessica Miller - Aye; Cynthia Mitchell - Aye; Skipper Manter - Aye.
The Motion was approved unanimously. (3-0)***

Ms. Miller moved to accept the donations for the tree removal and replacement. Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.

***Roll Call Vote: Jessica Miller - Aye; Cynthia Mitchell - Aye; Skipper Manter - Aye.
The Motion was approved unanimously. (3-0)***

Mr. Manter supported first trying to find someone who could reuse the tree. Ms. Miller said that, if it could not be moved, a local mill might be interested in the wood.

Council on Aging Emergency Hire - Joyce Albertaine

The Board considered the emergency hire of Joyce Albertaine for the Council on Aging at Grade 4, Step 3, effective September 17, 2026, for 30 days.

Ms. Miller moved to approve the emergency hire. Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.

***Roll Call Vote: Jessica Miller - Aye; Cynthia Mitchell - Aye; Skipper Manter - Aye.
The Motion was approved unanimously. (3-0)***

Martha's Vineyard Commission Letter of Support - Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan Grant

Melinda Loberg said the Martha's Vineyard Commission was preparing an application to the state for a 604(b) planning grant. The grant would fund a Responsible Management Entity, or RME, available to all Island towns. The entity could consolidate testing and recordkeeping for the new nitrogen-reducing technologies the towns are installing.

Ms. Loberg said each town had different regulations and that the proposed entity would not regulate the towns. Its purpose would be to serve the towns by assuming the burden of testing and recordkeeping and by helping residents address nitrogen-reducing septic systems. Ms. Miller noted that the systems required substantial recordkeeping and data submission to remain operational.

Ms. Loberg said most towns had a Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan or a similar plan addressing nitrogen pollution in the ponds. Testing would show how the towns were doing and permit an iterative approach. She said residents might welcome help understanding the technologies, and bulk purchasing might reduce costs. The planning work would also include a business plan intended to provide the service at a reasonable rate because cost was a principal concern for residents.

Ms. Miller moved to endorse the project, sign a letter supporting the Martha's Vineyard Commission's Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan grant application, and authorize the Chair to sign on behalf of the Board. Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.

***Roll Call Vote: Jessica Miller - Aye; Cynthia Mitchell - Aye; Skipper Manter - Aye.
The Motion was approved unanimously. (3-0)***

Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated - Housing Meeting

Mr. Manter reported on a housing meeting he had attended at the Martha's Vineyard Commission with the Secretary of Housing. He said the meeting was scheduled from 10:15 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and that the Secretary asked everyone in the room to introduce themselves and identify Island housing issues. The introductions took up most of the scheduled time, and the meeting continued for about 15 additional minutes.

Mr. Manter said the Secretary addressed some of the matters being pursued, including the Seasonal Communities Act and possible amendments that could accomplish more. He described the meeting as positive and said everyone was trying to address housing, although the solution still seemed far away. Ms. Miller thanked him for attending.

Old Business - Speed Study Update

Ms. Rand said she reviewed MassDOT's website and spoke with someone in traffic. She posted a document online explaining how a town could request a speed study on a state road. She was told that MassDOT was unlikely to conduct a study unless there had been a significant increase in accidents or a change in the road's geometry. Seasonal traffic volume was not part of the study criteria.

Ms. Rand said MassDOT also cautioned that a speed study could result in a higher speed limit because the result was based on the speed at which 85 percent of vehicles traveled. She said the Town could submit a request through the Select Board, but it was likely to be denied. The Town could then pay for its own study to show why the speed limit should be changed, although the MassDOT contact believed the study was unlikely to produce the result residents sought.

Ms. Mitchell asked how long MassDOT would take to respond. Ms. Rand did not know. Ms. Miller said she had heard from many people, wished there was something the Town could do, and believed a request was the available option even if it did not achieve the desired result. She said that, if MassDOT denied the request and the Town had to pay for a study, the matter could go to Town Meeting so voters could decide whether to fund it. Ms. Mitchell agreed.

The Board discussed the request's scope. Ms. Rand asked whether the study was limited to the intersection of Old County Road and Edgartown-West Tisbury Road or included state roads generally. Mr. Manter said that intersection was the location brought to the Board's attention. Ms. Rand said she had contacted Eversource about a possible change to the intersection but had not received a response and would follow up. Ms. Miller said the request should have a narrow scope, and the Board agreed to limit it to the Edgartown-West Tisbury Road area discussed.

Ms. Miller moved to request that the state conduct a speed study on the identified portion of Edgartown-West Tisbury Road. Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Jessica Miller - Aye; Cynthia Mitchell - Aye; Skipper Manter - Aye.

The Motion was approved unanimously. (3-0)

Ms. Rand said response times varied and that the Town would need to track the request in case the Board decided to propose a warrant article. She said the previous request to voters for a study covering potentially all Town roads cost about \$27,000, while the area now under discussion was much smaller.

Announcements

Mr. Manter announced upcoming celebrations of life for two residents. He said Fran Bradley's service, a longtime Town EMT who served the Town in many capacities, would be held Friday at 4:00 p.m. He said Diane Powers's service would be held Saturday at 5:00 p.m. at the Agricultural Hall. Ms. Rand said Ms. Powers's event was a potluck. Mr. Manter said he expected to speak at Ms. Powers's service on behalf of the Board and noted that she had also served on the School Committee.

Correspondence

No correspondence was listed.

Public Comment

Mr. Manter invited questions from the public and members of the press. Josh, participating through Courtney's Zoom account, said that he and Courtney were getting married and asked about paperwork for their wedding at 844 State Road. After initially believing the event permit had already been handled, Ms. Rand determined that a different wedding had been considered the prior week and said this application would be placed on the following week's agenda.

Adjournment

Ms. Miller moved to adjourn. Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Jessica Miller - Aye; Cynthia Mitchell - Aye; Skipper Manter - Aye.

The Motion was approved unanimously. (3-0)

The meeting was adjourned at 4:59 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by Shawn Ramoutar, Board Administrator