

## Zoning Board of Appeals

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**From:** Tara J. Whiting <tarajw@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 8, 2023 9:01 AM  
**To:** zba@westtisbury-ma.gov  
**Subject:** Stillpoint

First, once again I want to state I admire and respect the work of the ZBA. And once again you all are put in an impossible position as a project is presented that flies in the face of the character of the town of West Tisbury and the will of its voters.

I am writing to express my deep concern over the application in front of the ZBA for Stillpoint. I have tried to be brief, and once again failed!

I am aware that you have received quite a bit of correspondence regarding this project. Quite a few of these letters are dated from when it first appeared before the ZBA and was then referred to the MVC. Some state some concerns about the project but then note how the "MVC" review process should address these concerns. Further, a lot speak about supporting Mr. Bena as a person with very loose reference to the project (which has changed a lot). Sadly, the MVC chose to totally punt on it's job here and dumped it all back onto WT. When you read through the decision, there are multiple places where they list numerous concerns, detriments and used the most obtuse language and yet passed it along anyway.

I feel like I could write pages about my concerns and outlining all the ways this goes against current zoning by laws. Further, this is all located in the RU district at a terrible stretch of the road. (The MVC DID NOT conduct it's own traffic study but relied on the applicant's 'data')

In section 9.2-2 of the by-laws, Review Criteria, when I read that whole page, I can only identify a few of the criteria that this would not affect. At least in the short term.

Examples:

A. General Findings The Zoning Board of Appeals may approve a Special Permit application only if it makes written findings that:

1. The proposed use is in harmony with the general purpose and intent of this bylaw.
2. The benefits of the proposed use to the Town outweigh its adverse effects.

The majority of this project cannot meet these first two general finding.

B. Specific Findings In order to approve a Special Permit, the ZBA shall also make specific written findings

that the proposed use, with appropriate conditions:

1. Is consistent with the purposes and requirements of the applicable land use district, overlay districts,

and other specific provisions of this bylaw (including Site Plan Review requirements) and of other applicable laws and regulations. From what I see, not at all.

2. Is compatible with surrounding uses and protective of the natural, historic, and scenic resources of the

Town. It is dressed up to be something, but it is little more than an elite location for (mostly) for profit gatherings. A want not a need.

4. Will not create excessive off-premises noise, dust, odor, or glare. Unknown, but with the INTENSITY that is proposed, how could it not??

5. Will not cause traffic congestion, impair pedestrian safety, or overload existing roads, considering their current width, surfacing, and condition. Of course it will, this is just a given. Remember there has been NO traffic study conducted except by the applicant. A bad stretch of road coming into or out of an even worse bridge situation, very little shoulder, no line of site....the INTENSITY of this project will be hugely problematic.

7. Will not adversely affect the availability or cost of housing for year-round residents of West Tisbury. Not a fair question in this out of control market, but if build-able lots are off the market, then off course it affects housing.

8. Will not cause significant environmental damage due to flooding, wetland loss, habitat or ecosystem disturbance, or damage to valuable trees. Define significant?? There will be disturbance in a sensitive area (watershed, to name one of many), and again with the INTENSITY of this project, I suspect it will be significant over time.

9. Will not cause other adverse environmental effects. Such effects may include:

- a. Pollution of surface water or groundwater;
- b. Salt-water intrusion in public or private domestic water supply wells;
- c. Inadequate water supply to meet the anticipated demand of the proposed activity or use or reduction of water supply to other properties;
- d. Noise and air pollution;
- e. Destruction of wildlife habitats and damage to wetlands or littoral ecology;
- f. Damage to marine fisheries and shellfish;
- g. Construction which unnecessarily damages the visual amenities of the site and which is not in harmony with the landscape type;
- h. Unnecessary decreases in agricultural use or potential productivity of land;

i. Erosion resulting from or caused by development.

All of these will most likely be affected in some way. Some over time, some right away. Damage/destruction by a thousand cuts.

The boards and committees of West Tisbury are being challenged like never before. Between massive projects like this or big houses, everyone is asking /pushing/wanting more. Then suing or threatening a lawsuit when they do not get their way.

The **voters** show up to town meeting and vote for what they want for WT. These by laws have to pass by a 2/3rds vote and pass the attorney general. While there may be a 'need' for some of the projects/events in this proposal, the overwhelming size/scope/impact of this will have a very detrimental effect for West Tisbury. I am asking that you all uphold the by laws of West Tisbury and vote NO. This majority of this project is a WANT and not a NEED.

Thank you for your time.

Tara Whiting-Wells

June 8, 2023

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals,

I'm writing in support of Thomas Bena and Stillpoint Project. I have known Thomas for many years, and I believe him to be an earnest person who wants to create and facilitate genuine community. He did so with Martha's Vineyard Film Festival, and I believe he will do this with Stillpoint Project.

We all mature throughout our lives, and our vision of what we want to create changes as well. Stillpoint Project is the further maturation of Mr. Bena's long-held desire to make community. I believe it will be a unique addition to our island.

I've been privy to Thomas' plans for Stillpoint property since he purchased it from Claudia Miller. I've had frequent and numerous conversations with him regarding his use of this space. His idea has not changed from its inception: to create a space for intimate gatherings for educational and healing purposes. The MVC has set conditions for his approval, limiting the number and size of events. This should be enough to assure this board that the use will not outstrip the space. Furthermore, I'm convinced Thomas doesn't want to host larger events. His mission has always been for more intimate gatherings in this space, in accord with the serenity of the properties surroundings.

As the former caretaker and land steward of this property from 2008-2022, I'm delighted this land will be held in conservation and limited in its development. The repurposing of the existing barn as a gathering space, and the land for public walking trails, while limiting further building and destruction of the current environment all appeal to me.

This is a unique environment; it has always felt healing to me as I've worked and cared for it. I believe Thomas will continue to be a good steward of the land while also sharing this 'healing' space with the community. I believe his intentions are right for this property. Given the opportunity, and approval, this will prove to be a place for contemplation and reflection, not large gatherings. This has been Thomas' intention from the idea's inception. He has not wavered.

Regards,

Justen Ahren

## Zoning Board of Appeals

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**From:** Ollie Becker <becker.ollie@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 7, 2023 9:36 PM  
**To:** zba@westtisbury-ma.gov  
**Subject:** Support for Stillpoint

To the WT ZBA,

As someone who grew up in West Tisbury, and was lucky enough to be able to come back and raise a family here, I look forward to the thoughtful community gatherings that will take place at Stillpoint. I have known Thomas Bena since I was in highschool, and more recently, through our work together at MVFF, I had a front row seat as this project developed. What began as a private 50 acre subdivision, with no commitment to conservation or public access, has now been transformed into a large new Land Bank property and a gathering space for our community. I remember driving by those locust gates as a teenager and dreaming about what might lay behind them, and now my children will have access to that very land. It seems like there is so much change happening in one direction on this island: it's becoming less neighborly, more exclusive, full of trophy homes, and increasingly less accessible to islanders. Stillpoint runs against this formidable tide.

I was privy to what felt like countless iterations of how a deal could be done to conserve land, create a gathering space and satisfy the needs of the prior owner, and if it were not for the commitment of all the parties involved, this outcome would have never happened. Stillpoint has already fostered conservation and created community access, and allowing them to operate their programs will be yet another gift for West Tisbury and the island as a whole. I thank the ZBA for all they do in keeping West Tisbury, West Tisbury, and I believe this project will build on our town's hallmarks of a strong community in a quiet rural environment.

Respectfully,

-Ollie Becker

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## Zoning Board of Appeals

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**From:** Justin Simpkins <just.simpkins@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 8, 2023 10:00 AM  
**To:** zba@westtisbury-ma.gov  
**Subject:** In Support Of Stillpoint

To Whom It May Concern:

Dear ZBA Members,

I am nearing the end of my twenties and I have grown up in a world that looks much different than that of generations past. With the rise of technology, glaring political division, and increasing effects of climate change the fact that mental health struggles are at an all time high, comes as no surprise to me.

I am a proponent for community, especially in my generation. I have led a multi year men's group that creates a safe space for young men to be vulnerable. I built a career development company that uses discussion to help entry level employees develop professional confidence. I have facilitated many workshops on discovering purpose and building relationships. These engagements have allowed me to sit in intimate communities with many young people. My first hand takeaway is that the next generation is craving for places where they can access meaning and connection.

This generation has been called lazy, entitled, and soft. I believe those are symptoms of a group of people who feel very lost and alone. The island is home to many members of this generation, whom I can also say (from first hand experience) are in the throes of this isolation. The means by which they cope with their loneliness are not helping this island grow and develop.

A community space in West Tisbury is EXACTLY what this island is yearning for, especially its younger members. A place to gather in small groups, a place to have meaningful discussions, a place to host intimate classes and workshops, a place for people to be seen and heard. Stillpoint is a place of quiet, a place of intention, a place of healing, and a place of connection.

My hope is that you see how needed this is.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

With Gratitude,

Justin Simpkins

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Building things that amplify the good in humanity.

[justinsimpkins.com](http://justinsimpkins.com)