

Zoning Board of Appeals

From: Chris Murphy <cwmchilmark@icloud.com>
Sent: Monday, July 3, 2023 7:59 AM
To: zba@westtisbury-ma.gov; planningboard@westtisbury-ma.gov; bos@westtisbury-ma.gov
Subject: Planning Board letter

Dear ZBA, driving around town tonight (June 17th) thinking about the letter Ginny Jones and Leah Smith sent to the ZBA about Stillpoint I find it hard to believe that two women I have known and admired most of my life could be so out of touch that they could write such a vitriolic letter purporting to come from the entire Planning Board. They would like you to think they are representing The Town and not just their own distorted views. Such letters so filled with inaccurate and misleading statements have no place in our town government. If their idea of what makes a 'for profit business' is any use for which the non-profit gets paid then the Ag Hall (a non-profit) should be right up there at the top of the list. For this shoulder season weekend there was the West Tisbury 8th grade graduation on Thursday evening (way over 100 people) which the Ag Society gets paid for, there was the Farmer's Market Saturday morning with again way over 100 people and in the evening a very large wedding with amplified sound I could hear at my house at least a mile away.(hundreds of people and of course the Ag Society gets paid). This is the other side of Polly Hill from Stillpoint but very much part of the same neighborhood. I think all of those uses were great, they are part of what makes us a community. They are not some awful EVENTS to be shunned. Not to pick on the Ag Society alone but trying to put Stillpoint in perspective, on Friday evening there was a lovely fund raiser at the Field Gallery with 220 sold tickets and 40 or so catering staff and board members. There was amplified music and amplified speeches, people milling about having a good time and all this in a space with no parking at all and neighbors near-by in all directions. I thought it was totally appropriate and really well done but still two or three times bigger than anything Stillpoint will ever do and, of course, just across the street there was a fairly large meeting going on in the church parish hall.

This business of trying to calculate the total number of people using a particular place in the course of a year is absurd and very misleading. The total at a given event might be useful for planning purposes but putting together annual totals is just to scare people. The Ag Society has well over 40 thousand people on their grounds during the week of the fair, more than Stillpoint will see in a year and again it is a wonderful EVENT and beloved by the Island community. Please do not let the fear mongers rule the day. When Stillpoint is up and running it will go unnoticed by almost all of us and for those who do use it it will be a great gift.

Sincerely, Chris Murphy

Zoning Board of Appeals

From: Patricia Moore <mooreiipaddy@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, June 8, 2023 4:28 PM
To: Zoning Board of Appeals West Tisbury
Subject: Stillpoint

Dear Members of the West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals:

I apologize for the lateness of this comment, but I have been, and still am, struggling with Covid. Tonight, West Tisbury has the opportunity to help preserve 40 pristine acres of very special land and to allow people to experience the silence and deeper conversations that lead to understanding across divides — cultural, racial, class, gender, etc.

Stillpoint has presented this opportunity with careful planning and great vision. I urge you to not dismiss this possibility. Please do not give way to cynicism and suspicion. Please find a thoughtful path that will permit Stillpoint and its vision to become reality.

Very Truly Yours,

Patricia W. Moore
18 Alley Way
West Tisbury, MA 02575
(508) 693-1627

Zoning Board of Appeals

From: linda mccarthy <chilmark23@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, June 23, 2023 7:42 AM
To: zba@westtisbury-ma.gov
Subject: Stillpoint...

To Whom It May Concern:

Last week I had two people who were born here , whom I have known for years and knowing that I arrived here as a young adult in 1969, say that they felt that I was "an islander." That to me is a huge compliment. As those who have lived here for a long time, one cannot but witness both positive and negative changes. I have great respect for those who work to keep this island a place safe and accommodating for the families who call Martha's Vineyard home. I read both papers and often have an opinion of this and that. I think of responding and never do. I have been following the articles about Stillpoint. I do not know Thomas Bena other than to say hello at the post office. I attended his films he brought to the Chilmark Community Center from time to time. What I do know is, he is a visionary, he is a man of his word, his intention is to enhance the environment for others. He passed the torch for the film center and created a venue that continues to enhance the life of those who live here. I imagine that over time Stillpoint will thrive and bring value to those who attend what is offered. To those of you on the ZBA, I thank you for the time and effort you give to keep this island the place we cherish .

Best,
Linda McCarthy

Zoning Board of Appeals

From: Cindra Trish <ctrish@hamv.org>
Sent: Friday, June 9, 2023 2:02 PM
To: zba@westtisbury-ma.gov
Cc: Lynn Marquedant
Subject: Our support for Stillpoint

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Greetings Kim,

Today my Healthy Aging Martha's Vineyard (HAMV) colleagues and I met with Thomas Bena to explore opportunities to utilize Stillpoint for community interactions around education, awareness, and advocacy regarding Healthy Aging - for not only our Older Adults but all islanders who are aging each day!

It was simply delightful to breathe in the stillness (excuse the pun), enjoy the natural beauty of the location, and explore the amenities of the barn itself for future gatherings. Thomas' vision for creating a gathering place which will foster conversation, listening, and learning from each other addresses a vital need on our island.

We left our meeting today excited about how we might be able to utilize this location to create impactful and meaningful dialogue for all islanders. HAMV is celebrating its 10th anniversary this fall and we are exploring hosting some events at Stillpoint that engage and educate our community on the needs and contributions of Older Adults and encourages a discussion on how we can work together to ensure that Martha's Vineyard is truly an aging friendly community.

In closing, we heartily support such a location/vision and hope that the Zoning Board will also do so. I do believe that respecting the neighborhood and the environment is well within the ethos of this organization and that the community can work together to make this a reality.

Thank you,
Cindy

Cindy Trish
Executive Director
Healthy Aging Martha's Vineyard
ctrish@hamv.org
508 693-7900 ext. 455 (office)
508 954-0357 (cell)



Zoning Board of Appeals

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

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

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

From: aearly@vineyard.net
Sent: Wednesday, June 7, 2023 11:09 AM
To: zba@westtisbury-ma.gov
Subject: Stillpoint
Attachments: image001.png

Dear ZBA members,

I write in support of the Stillpoint proposal you'll be considering tomorrow. Though I have lived in Chilmark since 1999, my family's roots are in West Tisbury (1924-2014) and I have been familiar with Claudia Miller's property and the surrounding area for some time. That swath of woodlands and ponds, including the Polly Hill Arboretum, is a place of great beauty that offers rare tranquility and natural healing to anyone entering it. I believe the Stillpoint project will only complement and enhance what is already there. Some may have concerns that Stillpoint will be another Film Festival, or that it might commercialize a part of the town. I believe there is a big difference between commercializing and access and that the alternative of having more high end private homes is more "commercial" and that it would take away from the commons in a way that Stillpoint will give back. Stillpoint will be joining a collection of West Tisbury properties from Polly Hill through the Ag Hall that provide careful stewardship as well as public access.

In all my years as a part time and now full time MV resident, I've never seen the fabric of our community so badly rent by economic, cultural, and political divisions or so many of the people I hold dear living on the edge. Throughout my business career, and now as a consultant and writer, it's been my observation that more solutions to thorny problems and emotionally-charged positions come from listening and reflecting what one hears than anything else we try. Nothing releases anxiety and defensiveness better than feeling truly heard. Eyes, ears, and hearts open. Often common ground can be found and creative solutions can bubble up, even from previously discounted sources.

Our island community is short of spaces where people can gather for any purpose, much less to experiment in building and rebuilding our sense of community and belonging through shared experiences and conversations. I believe the Stillpoint facility and the kind of activities it will foster (forums, conversations, dance, crafts, yoga, reading groups, films, and just plain fun) will provide shelter, structure, and encouragement for needed encounters that might spark understanding and change.

I believe this is an instance of "if you build it, they will come." Our fragmentation, aggravated by the fears and isolation of COVID and the influx of new residents, has made the yearning for connection and re-connection palpable. Stillpoint could be the locus for connections of all kinds.

I hope you will grant approval to the proposal. Thank you for the essential work you do for the community.

Alice Early

Alice C. Early

Award-winning Author, Career Transition Coach
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She/her/hers
Visit me at www.aliceearly.com

Zoning Board of Appeals

From: Marc Rosenbaum <marc@energysmiths.com>
Sent: Monday, June 5, 2023 12:35 PM
To: zba@westtisbury-ma.gov
Subject: note of support for Stillpoint project

To the West Tisbury Zoning Board of Adjustment:

I am writing in support of the Stillpoint project that is before you. I believe its mission and programs will be a much appreciated addition to community life in West Tisbury. It appears that the conditions that the MVC applied to their approval will provide appropriate relief to abutters. Thank you for allowing this project to go forward.

Marc Rosenbaum
Great Plains Road

CHARLES H SILBERSTEIN, MD

Martha's Vineyard Hospital, Oak Bluffs, MA 02557

csilbersteinmd@gmail.com

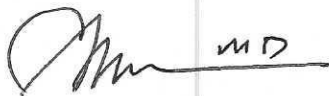
(508) 696-1990

June 3, 2023

To: The West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals

I have lived in West Tisbury since 1997 and been a member of the medical staff at Martha's Vineyard Hospital since 1995. I am a close neighbor of Stillpoint. I am writing in support of the Stillpoint Project and the work of Thomas Bena and Jake Davis. As the medical director of Island Counseling Center at MVCS, I am acutely aware of the need for increased community conversations, collaborations, and connections. Stillpoint would bring that to West Tisbury for all of us and would be a healing and helpful gathering space.

Sincerely,

 MD

Zoning Board of Appeals

From: Lynne Whiting <lynne.whiting@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, May 27, 2023 7:37 AM
To: zba@westtisbury-ma.gov
Cc: Thomas Bena
Subject: Support for Stillpoint

To the WT Zoning Board of Appeals,

I am writing to lend my support to the Stillpoint Project.

As an island Educator in the 1990s, I recall many discussions about human development centered on this quote: ***“Change is inevitable; growth is optional.”*** As a year round WT resident & neighbor of the Stillpoint property, parent and grandparent, retired school teacher and active member of the non-profit world on MV, those words come back to me often. I never knew the source of the quote until recently when I learned that American Author and Leadership speaker, John Maxwell is credited. His belief is that ***“To reach your potential, you must grow. And, to grow, you must be intentional about it.”***

I loved the West Tisbury of 1976 when I moved into Town. I love it today in 2023. I’m grateful to those in our Town leadership who have helped guide growth through sometimes challenging times. The larger world around us has changed demonstrably in the decades since my arrival. I would like to think that Stillpoint can and will provide opportunities for personal growth that helps us face the inevitable changes of life as we know it. Accepting change is often difficult, but looking at options and being open to them is essential.

My belief is that Thomas Bena and others who support Stillpoint want to provide an arena where intention is part of the foundation.

I think we all agree that both change and growth, especially in such a desirable place as Martha’s Vineyard, are bound to happen. How those changes look, where they happen and why, are all areas that town boards like the ZBA are looking after. I know that the potential of 1000 events a year has been mentioned in the media. My understanding is that Thomas and his board are aiming to offer 3 to 4 events such as classes, conversations or contemplative offerings per day at Stillpoint. As stipulated by the MVC, they would be limited to the numbers of attendees.

I trust that you can and will work with Thomas and his board to arrive at mutually agreeable guidelines. Your informed leadership is key. Providing a peaceful place in nature when people can come together, agree to disagree and move forward with intention is a gift. I hope that our Town is able to accept these gifts and utilize the outcomes the future offers. I look forward to attending the first “event” of many on this property.

Respectfully,

Lynne Whiting
985 State Road
West Tisbury

Zoning Board of Appeals

From: Stacy Wise <mssanseverino@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 24, 2023 9:14 AM
To: zba@westtisbury-ma.gov
Cc: Thomas Bena
Subject: Stillpoint

I had the good fortune of talking with Thomas Bena while walking through Stillpoint. I believe Stillpoint will be such an incredible asset to our island community. Our West Tisbury family is so looking forward to seeing the enrichment that will come from the people, land, and programming Stillpoint will provide.

Thanks,

Stacy Wise and Family
24 Indian Pipe Lane
West Tisbury

Dear Zoning Board Members:

An active, year-round resident of West Tisbury, I would like to add my voice to the conversation about Stillpoint and the plans Jake Davis and Thomas Bena have to use the property for conversation, meditation and education. I understand and appreciate everyone's concerns about conserving the natural beauty of our island and meeting the needs of lower income community members because I am a former member of the Sheriff's Meadow Foundation Board, a current member of the Martha's Vineyard Community Services Board, and a mom to two Vineyard-raised kids who are young advocates for environmental sustainability and racial equality. The Favreaus are on the side of conservation and social justice. But I'm on the side of wellness, healing and community too. In my experience and observation, we need neutral spaces for intentional conversation and contemplation with each other and with nature. This is the promise of Stillpoint, as I understand it.

After the murders of George Floyd and too many other Black people who look like me and members of my family, I felt somewhat isolated -- and angry -- on Martha's Vineyard. I didn't know how, where or what to share until Jake and Thomas invited me into a circle of conversation, space, and nature. Sitting outside together with a diverse group of strangers (who have become friends), I felt connected to the natural beauty of not only our island, but also its people. I felt safe, heard, supported and seen. I shared truths about my experience as a Black mom on the island and elsewhere, and I learned the other sides to some shared stories. The process of reconciliation and healing began for me and others who shared those moments. This is the potential of what Jake and Thomas are trying to build -- fresh opportunities to treat our spaces and our people with respect and care.

I realize there's a lot of demand for the land we share. There are so many needs and wants; it must be hard to decide what to say "yes" or "no" to as it relates to our precious properties. And it is tempting to pursue all of our wants with every acquisition. It is my hope that you will consider the wellness needs of our community, in addition to the environmental and housing needs of our island, and allow Jake and Thomas' work to move forward as soon as possible. Concessions have already been made, and the project feels long overdue. During our 10+ years on island, shared spaces like the YMCA, Polly Hill, and the Agricultural Society have been critical to our community's ability to show up for each other, and there's still a lot of unmet need.

A recent study by NORC (a nonpartisan and objective research organization at the University of Chicago), revealed that happiness is at an all-time low, with fewer people describing themselves as happy today than in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (June 2020). I can't pretend to understand all the causes of our collective and individual angst, but I feel it among my friends on island too. We worry about the realities and futures of so many people and things. It's overwhelming and hard, which explains why mental health issues on our island (and elsewhere) are becoming more prevalent. Jake and Thomas are offering a salve, and I truly hope we can find a way to support them in their effort to support all of us.

Thank you for your consideration,

Patty Favreau

Dear Members of the West Tisbury ZBA,

This letter is to offer my full support for the Stillpoint education and public access project.

For the last several years Thomas has been working on preserving this property, gathering supporters and financing, all while including stakeholders and the larger Island community. His devotion has brought us to this point and my letter serves to remind us of the considerable community benefit of Thomas' past involvement in Island based community projects. They have left a lasting impact on the minds, hearts and landscapes of the Martha's Vineyard and other communities. Through his film *One Big Home*, discussions that led to sensible land use and laws discouraging massive mansions, have helped to change the culture of private vacation home development here on Martha's Vineyard and in other parts of the country. It is with this same spirit and sense of mission that Thomas pursues his vision of creating and expanding a network of trails for the public while simultaneously creating an educational and community space at Stillpoint.

This unique property was intact at 52 acres. Without Thomas' involvement, Claudia Miller's support, along with the cooperation of the Landbank, this property likely would have gone in the direction of so many others on Martha's Vineyard. What was slated to be a 12-lot subdivision of multimillion dollar homes is now poised to be preserved for the community use permanently and forever.

Islanders long for the type of social engagement that this sort of institution fosters. I have learned pottery at and attended events at Featherstone. My family has had some of the most memorable nights of our lives watching films put on by the Martha's Vineyard Film Festival while it was being run by Thomas (and others). I am excited to attend workshops and events at Stillpoint.

We should be celebrating already. This unique piece of property, adjacent to the Mill Brook Watershed is on the verge of being available for the use and enjoyment of the many rather than the few. It is for the benefit of Islanders and visitors, the living, and the yet to be born.

J Max Simon
Chilmark Resident and Voter
(310) 621-3306

jmaxsimon@mac.com

Zoning Board of Appeals

From: maddy ezanno <mezanno@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 16, 2023 9:15 PM
To: zba@westtisbury-ma.gov; Thomas Bena
Subject: Still Point project

Dear Commissions and Board Members ,

I am writing on behalf of the Stillpoint project hoping and pleading for this beautiful and much needed vision and idea to become a reality.

I cant think of a better time for the community to gather and have a place we can all visit to walk land bank trails, attend workshops, learn, share and be in the presence of others. Meet new friends and reunite w old friends.

I have lived on Martha's Vineyard since 1986, and started living year round in 1998. My daughter, juniper was born and raised here in West Tisbury . We are proud west Tisbury residents and would welcome this project w open arms.

I was lucky enough to hear about this project early on and could barely contain my excitement!!!

I fully support this and trust that anything Thomas has brewing will be a great success and also a healing, happy environment for all to enjoy!

I know he has worked endlessly to make sure the community will benefit as much as he will from actualizing the stillpoint project.

Quite frankly, i do not reason why anyone would oppose .

As a matter of fact,

we are all fortunate that the Still point project will replace the possibility of a 12 unit subdivision, which in my opinion, would have been a major disaster and disturbance to the neighborhood .

I am Looking forward to the opening of Still point and hopefully contributing in my own way .

Thank you ,

Madeleine and Philippe and Juniper Ezanno Thank you , Maddy

DANIEL WATERS
P.O. Box 595
West Tisbury, MA 02575
508-560-2011 cell

5 December 2022

To the West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals:

I'm writing to amplify and reinforce the message in my letter of last September. Please add my remarks to your public record regarding the Stillpoint project currently under discussion.

I speak as someone who has lived on the Island his whole adult life. Like so many who live here year-round, I wear many hats, but in this case I would like to be heard purely as a member of the broader community. I have no special expertise, so I cannot address matters of traffic, septic and groundwater, but I can speak from experience as an artist, a poet, and an average Island resident who relies deeply on the Island's natural environment for solace and sanity.

All my life — and especially during the pandemic — I have found peace and inspiration in the Island's conservation properties and unspoiled natural places. I've also witnessed a lot of Island history in the nearly fifty years I've lived here. I remember decades ago when Waskosims Rock, with its stunning hills and erratic boulders, was purchased by a developer and drawn up to be a development for several dozen residences. It's appalling to look at that proposed plot plan and realize the disaster that could have unfolded — up to the moment when that unique piece of land became a Land Bank property that has now been ours to enjoy for more than a generation. In contrast, look at what happened nearby at Spring Point in Chilmark (just up the road), and what was lost when it became a gated community, off-limits to the community forevermore.

More recently, Stillpoint almost became a similar development. I'm sure you have all seen the plans for the ten or more houses (with guest houses, accessory structures and tennis courts) that might have been built there. The Stillpoint package that Thomas Bena negotiated with Claudia Miller, which set aside a generous swath of acreage for the Land Bank, has averted a massive build-out of this sensitive land. As with Waskosims, I urge you to think of all the septic systems, roads, construction and traffic that will not happen here as a result. As with Spring Point, please imagine all the summer cocktail parties, private weddings and summer rentals that could have taken place at those unbuilt residences, but no longer will. When we discuss Stillpoint, I hope you will bear in mind that the community is receiving a priceless gift in return: a sprawling stretch of forest, meadows and ponds that will join the Woods Preserve and Waskosims Rock as a contiguous stretch of unbroken land for conservation and human enjoyment.

Somehow this discussion has become about weddings. They have become the tail that wags the dog, so I would like to address this issue.

One of the many hats I've worn in my life was as development director for the Martha's Vineyard Museum for four years during their capital campaign for the Marine Hospital. I know a thing or two about fund-raising on Martha's Vineyard. It's not the picnic that you might think, asking the Island's seasonal visitors to support a community they only spend a few weeks a year in, and understand in only a superficial way.

Martha's Vineyard has more than 250 nonprofits. There is a perception that the Island's nonprofits secretly wallow in cash because they look so successful from the outside. That is incredibly frustrating if one works on the inside as an organization's philanthropy officer. The reality is that many Island nonprofits operate on a shoestring, and many could not exist without a steady stream of charitable donations in addition to what one might call "non-mission" revenue from events like weddings and summer galas. There is a staggering amount of shrimp cocktail and Palm Beach cheese puffs fed to Vineyard donors each year, enticing them to support every cause from family planning to substance abuse prevention to wildlife protection. The hospital's annual golf tournament bears no connection to Island health care.

Donor fatigue is real. Building trust with donors is difficult but essential. Many rich people (known as "people of capacity" in the fund-raising business) test a nonprofit's worthiness the way they look at their corporation's bottom line. They give advice like this: "Your nonprofit is sitting on a big, beautiful property that's vacant much of the time. Have you ever thought of earning some money by renting it out for weddings? Before you come to me for a hand-out, show me your profit-and-loss sheet." To them, a nonprofit board looks lazy and negligent until it proves it has earned every outside dollar before turning to donors for help.

I am well aware that you will hear from passionate, intelligent, well-meaning people on both sides of this issue. I know it will be nearly impossible to find a solution that makes everybody happy. For this reason, I admire the ZBA and I don't envy you the balancing act you're being asked to do in this case.

Unfortunately, the only advice I can offer you is to not make the perfect the enemy of the good. To do this means recognizing that wedding rentals are a small but important piece of the tricky jigsaw puzzle that Island nonprofits must somehow solve every year in order to do the important work they do. Wedding rentals do not generate as much income as one might think. To use a West Tisbury metaphor, it's less of a cash cow and more like egg money.

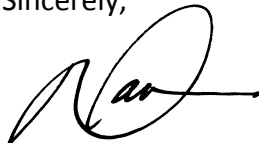
In Stillpoint we've already gained so much — so many lasting benefits that we had no reason to expect many years ago when the MV Commission originally approved all those house lots. I believe Thomas and his partners are acting in good faith. Rather than reaching for easy profit, I see them embarking on a bold and difficult mission that will give the Island something that will

benefit not only the natural environment but the human environment... the community at large.

Finally, I have reached the age where I'm happy to see young people make major sacrifices, spending time, risking money, and running the Island's formidable gauntlet of approval procedures in order to bring positive change to the Island. I'd like to see my generation, the elders, show some grace in handing over the reins while we can still do so in a supportive way. Instead of discouraging these efforts, I hope we will demonstrate some faith and trust in the Islanders of the future — even if that means relinquishing to them some of the responsibility and oversight that we've enjoyed during our own lifetimes.

In short, after you've weighed all the feedback that you will inevitably receive, I hope you'll give Stillpoint a fair chance to fulfill its vision and its promise. Thank you for playing a critical role in this important process!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Waters". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dan Waters
West Tisbury

December 5, 2022

Dear West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals,

I am writing as a year-round West Tisbury resident to express my full support for Stillpoint project.

For complete transparency, I am a board member for Stillpoint, but I am writing as a West Tisbury resident, an environmentalist and someone who loves this unique island and its community.

Over the past decade, I have watched our community interactions change, from personal to electronic. From having mutual respect for people of all opinions to a place where we demonize those who differ from us. In light of all this, I think a physical space where we can come together as humans, as a community and have hard conversation, will allow us to learn and grow together. Stillpoint is the perfect median for this important work.

This island has the worst resource allocation I can think of. We have structures that sit empty and drain electricity, water and pollute with no benefit to the community or even the individuals who own these properties because they never use them. The prior plans for this site would have had a significantly detrimental impact on our environment had Thomas not put the purchase plan together, which has created Stillpoint. Stillpoint is unique in that it is already built. This structure will serve and benefit the entire island community, not just a few privileged individuals.

As a Certified Public Accountant who works for a non-profit on the island full time, I would like to remind you that Stillpoint is a 501c3 non-profit. Per IRS guidelines, this means that the organization must not deviate from its mission. It must not serve private interests. All earnings must be used solely for the advancement of the charitable cause. While some unrelated income is allowed, the organization must not receive substantial income from unrelated business operations. I mention this, because the recent conversations focused on speculative weddings and not the actual application and the benefits of Stillpoint. I believe the non-profit status makes the weddings and any potential impact on the community a non-issue as they cannot legally be a significant part of the operations.

I understand the challenging balancing act you are charged with as the Zoning Board. I urge you to give Stillpoint a fair and honest evaluation. Focus on the facts and plans not the speculation and talking points used to agitate the community with no basis. If given a non-biased review, I am confident that you will support this important project. Thank you for your time, consideration and work towards maintaining this beautiful and unique island that we all love.

Sincerely,

Scott Fish,

West Tisbury, MA

To the Martha's Vineyard Commission:

I have been in regular attendance at the MVC Zoom hearings on the proposed Stillpoint project. I am writing today to express my strong support for this project which I believe will bring tremendous added value to our island community.

It's projects like Stillpoint that bring islanders together and give Martha's Vineyard its reputation as a center for innovative educational programming.

I have no doubt that the founders of Stillpoint are committed to working with their neighbors, as well as the Town of West Tisbury, to address any concerns and ultimately to be of service to us all.

Sincerely,

Larry

Larry Glick
Chilmark, MA
508-335-7300

December 5, 2022

Via email: zba@westtisbury-ma.gov

RE: Stillpoint

To The Members of the West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals:

Having had an extensive visit to the existing barn and surrounding property, along with several conversations with Thomas Bena, I am writing in strong support for both Thomas's overall vision for the proposed project and for the thoroughness and care with which he has sought to mitigate impacts on the community and the environment. Through his long directorship of the Martha's Vineyard Film Festival Thomas has clearly demonstrated an unwavering commitment to community well being, as well as the willingness to act on that commitment and its attendant logistics in commendably responsible ways. Regarding the present proposal, these attributes are reflected not only in the type of programming envisioned, but also in the steps taken to ensure that the greatest portion of land associated with Stillpoint will be set aside in perpetuity for public use.

As an architect with direct experience in the development of several community-based projects, including Featherstone Center For The Arts and the Chappaquiddick Community Center, I can attest to the value of such facilities to the year-round community. At the same time, in our rich and diverse community there will always be a need for spaces accessible to the public for the types of programs envisioned here. I can't imagine a better use for such an excellent building and the lovely property on which it sits.

Respectfully,

Bruce MacNelly, Architect

Dear Members of the West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals,

I am in favor of supporting Stillpoint and this proposed project.

As an educator and culture keeper of our Wampanoag history and ways, I foresee the Stillpoint project as a means to quietly share the stories, and accurate history of this rich island and its first people.

Thomas Bena, is one of the few out of the many non-profits on MV that has asked us as the first people of Noëpe to share in this space. To have a place to gather with folks of all walks of life, to find our common ground and ways that allow both a deepening and understanding of our heart knowledge and love of our homelands.

Personally, as a Wampanoag woman and a member of our tribal medicine family, I returned home for this very reason. To help others along a journey of understanding our need to heal in ways similar to our cultural traditions, by sitting in meditation, with our mother earth and water. This sacred space is the perfect place to return to nature, it's blessings, and connect to the teachings of our lands. All by turning inwards to find solutions for the hasty changes that are taking place on Martha's Vineyard.

Lastly, I foresee this space as a place to connect so we can address the climate needs of this island through the teachings of our indigenous ways. Non-denominational, through heart, with respect, and through the love we all share for our home, Noëpe.

Respectfully, Carole Vandal

Robert C. Reardon
23 North Road
Chilmark

April 9, 2023

Dear Members of the West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals,

I am a Trustee for the MV Diversity Coalition and a member of the leadership team of MV Black Lives Matter. Both organizations do the hard work of bringing people of disparate and often polarized views together in the hope of breaking the barriers of misunderstanding and gaining movement toward lasting reconciliations. Critical to these engagements being successful is that they occur in a peaceful if not meditative atmosphere conducive to truly listening to each other.

Of the many places on this magnificent island of ours that have brought that sense of peace, none has exuded it so naturally as when I immersed myself into the near-spiritual atmosphere of Stillpoint. I have shared with Thomas Bena some of the many groups who would similarly be moved to the careful listening that seems to come so easily and uniquely at Stillpoint. Every consideration should be given to this special place which others will come to cherish as I have.

Bob Reardon

|

**Robert C. Reardon
23 North Road
Chilmark, MA 02535**

Dear Commissioners and Board Members,

As a Trustee of the Martha's Vineyard Diversity Coalition (MVDC) and a member of the leadership team for the Martha's Vineyard Black Lives Matter movement (MVBLM), I am writing to support and endorse Thomas Bena's Stillpoint project.

As you may know, the work of both the MVDC and MV BLM organizations frequently requires difficult conversations around racism and racial justice among people or groups who often come to the table with differing if not opposing views. The hard work it takes to achieve progress - - and sometimes even consensus - - toward a more caring Island is its own reward. But having a neutral and non-threatening venue for dialogue can set a tone of trust to advance those discussions and significantly increase the likelihood of positive outcomes.

If I could have imagined a location and an ambiance that would be close to perfect, I would still fall short of envisioning what I experienced in a single visit to the incredible space both within the magnificent barn and the expansive, conserved surroundings. (I have enumerated in writing to Thomas a number of needed conversations with which MVDC and MV BLM identify, as examples which could greatly benefit by taking place at Stillpoint. I am happy to share them with you.)

Finally, Thomas Bena's integrity long precedes him as do the reputations of those working directly with him. They will fulfill what they promise, including the highest respect for the protection of the environment which holds and surrounds Stillpoint.

Bob Reardon

Trustee, Martha's Vineyard Diversity Coalition

Leadership team, Martha's Vineyard Black Lives Matter

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing in regards to Thomas Bena and the Stillpoint project.

My viewpoint is from the perspective of one intimately acquainted with the property having been in the employment of the previous owner, Claudia Miller as property manager before, during and after her stewardship of this remarkable piece of land. We always were aware of how unique this property was and even while private was an asset to the greater community of Martha's Vineyard.

My opinion is that the current assemblage of entities and their collective visions for the future not only respect and honor the property itself, but are inclusive of the community as a whole. I therefore lend my support for Mr. Bena in an endeavor that I believe respects the property itself and enriches the community of Martha's Vineyard.

Thank you for the consideration of my opinion.

Respectfully,

David Brown

To whoever it may concern:

September 13, 2022

I am writing to express my support for the StillPoint Project in West Tisbury, spearheaded by Thomas Bena.

A special meeting place to meet, discuss, learn and meditate on important topics is exactly what our community, and world, need in this ever increasing (and exhausting!) divisive, digital world. A place intentionally designed to encourage us to reflect on issues, our community, and our lives — in person, in real time — is exactly what we need more of. And based on Thomas' experience with the Film Festival, I am confident that diverse and thought-provoking speakers will be invited.

I have visited the current location, and find the re-purposing of the barn and preservation of open space to be ideal and respectful. Stillpoint aligns well both in vision and in purpose with its neighbors including Polly Hill and nearby Land Bank properties, making that area of State Road a place for enjoyment of nature and discrete gatherings.

I understand that there may be concerns about traffic and parking. We live just a few miles from the site and travel near it routinely. But the traffic study showed there would be minimal impacts given the nature and frequency of events. I also trust that Thomas' plan for a 40-car parking space while limiting tree clearing will be done responsibly. In fact, our son helped him on the property this summer and we were all impressed with the thoughtful approach Thomas took to landcare.

Once again, I am in full support of the Stillpoint project and believe Thomas has been thorough and considerate in his approach to this project. West Tisbury and the Island will be a better place with such a peaceful place of reflection and discussion.

Thank you very much for all your time, effort and consideration.

Josh Thomson



Sept 22, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

As a long time, Vineyard homeowner, I am writing in support of Thomas Bena's plans for Stillpoint.

Knowing the property, the plans for Stillpoint is a great way to repurpose the structures and grounds.

With Thomas as the steward, it will be a successful project and of benefit to the community.

If there is concern regarding large gatherings, I imagine restrictions could be incorporated for weddings, retreats, fundraisers, etc.

Please reach out with any questions: (617) 429-7595

Sincerely,

Keith Moskow FAIA
Chilmark

September 29, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to support of the Stillpoint project in West Tisbury.

I worked with Thomas Bena for over a decade. I know firsthand his dedication to this community, his commitment to the environment, and his desire to create a wholistic gathering space for discussion, meditation, and the arts.

I know he will work collaboratively with the town and the growing non-profit network on the Martha's Vineyard.

As the Executive Director of an organization which he founded and ran for over 20 years, I have seen what an impact his work can have on the community. He established and led an organization that builds community, inspires conversation, and fosters artists. I am confident Stillpoint will be able to have a positive impact on the community in brand new ways.

I sincerely hope that you will support his efforts so that the beautiful barn at Stillpoint and the incredible piece of land it sits on can be preserved from development and utilized by the community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Ditchfield". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Brian Ditchfield
Executive Director
Circuit Arts / The Martha's Vineyard Film Festival

Dear Commissioners and Board Members,

My name is Dana Edelman. I've lived on the island with my family year-round for over 11 years. One of my experiences, while being involved in music and the arts, was collaborating with Thomas Bena to bring live music programming to the Martha's Vineyard Film Festival. It was then that I witnessed first hand Thomas' commitment to our island community. I learned of his deep and genuine calling to contribute to the community's greater well-being; and I recognized his gifts and talents that made it possible to actually achieve results. Year after year, I couldn't help but see how enriched people were after spending time communing, thinking, feeling, and engaging in content and discussion that was important, real, necessary. Thomas is a person who has already enriched our island community and I wholeheartedly support his vision for Stillpoint. Firstly, Thomas and those he collaborates with will be mindful stewards of that incredible land. Secondly, the 4 C's that lie at the heart of the Stillpoint Project, community, classes, conversation, and contemplation, all fundamentally lead to deeper awareness and improved well-being, individually and collectively. Beautiful things will happen. I therefore feel strongly that Stillpoint will be a most welcome addition to our community and I look forward to its presence here on Martha's Vineyard.

Respectfully,

Dana Edelman
9/25/2022

Dear Commissioners and Board Members,

I support the use of the Stillpoint Meadows Barn and space to be used as a public gathering space in our community. From what I understand the space will serve as a means of bringing people together for events that will/could be beneficial for all of us.

It's an unusual opportunity in our rural town and I see the location to be a good one for parking and privacy. The neighbors who abut the property purchased their homes with the understanding that this barn would eventually be some sort of an event space open to the public. This was all a part of the former owner's plan to preserve her property - she was thrilled to incorporate the Land Bank as a partial owner to help support the public access to this beautiful piece of land.

The way this property was sold was so incredibly thoughtful and sensitive to both the physical beauty and natural resources but also to our community by avoiding a large development which would have been entirely possible.

I'm encouraged by Thomas' vision and I look forward to seeing this space evolve into one that can increase community relations for our town and island.

I wish him luck!

Jill Hobby Napior
(508)642-0831

September 28, 2022

Dear Commissioners and Board Members,

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.

Furthermore, as the caretaker and land steward of this property from 2008-2022, I am delighted this land will be held in conservation and limited in its development. The repurposing of the existing barn as a gathering space, public walking trails, and the limiting of further building and destruction of the current environment all appeal to me. This is a unique environment; it has always felt healing to me to work and care for it. I believe this project will continue to be a good steward while also sharing this 'healing' space with our community.

I hope you will agree. Regards,

Justen Ahren

Dear Commissioners and Board Members,

Sept. 6, 2022

As a long time resident of West Tisbury I am writing in support of Thomas Bena's Stillpoint project to create a meeting place for our community.

As the chairman of the West Tisbury Land Bank Advisory Board, I was privy to all the good faith efforts by Claudia Miller and Thomas Bena to pull this extraordinary effort together that involved both public, private, and nonprofit participation. The end results now is a magnificent piece of conservation land and a beautiful location for a community space to gather and dig in on topics that hopefully bring us closer together.

My only concern is the watershed, but I'm sure with the MVC policies in place, this can be address in a way that protects our headlands of the Tisbury Great Pond through septic upgrades, if necessary.

Sincerely ,

Andrew Woodruff

Dear Commissioner and Board Members,

I support the Still Point Project.

The project expands un fragmented contiguous woodland from Chilmark to West Tisbury. The project protects the Mill Brook Watershed along with historical structures of the old Mill Dam. In addition, the project proposes to facilitate a more quiet and Less Consumptive interaction between people and the natural world.

On August 31 Thomas Bena showed me around the project site. Highlights: a modest barn with a surprisingly simple but functional underground passive solar heating system; a garden; 2 otters bathing in Crocker Pond; an old turtle swimming in the Mill Spillway and many peaceful moss covered trails winding through native woods.

The following proposed infrastructure plans all seemed legitimate and necessary: The barn needs updates to accommodate public gatherings and access by all; small cabins are needed to house visiting teachers; a timber frame workshop will be needed to increase space for craft making ; and small pull out parking areas will be created near the barn. This parking will resemble the very low impact, non tree killing, Polly Hill Arboretum parking lot. The land around the still point project will be left "natural" as in Natural /Indigenous to Martha's Vineyard...trails and small already cleared areas will be mowed only to keep down briars and to promote native field species and pollinator habitat. The land bank will be taking over the management and stewardship of the land of the mill brook watershed along Priester's and Crocker Ponds.

Over the years I have spent a great deal of time working and exploring this region of the island. I am relieved and grateful that this piece of land will now be cared for by the Still Point Project. Since the Core Values of Still Point are to create a space for Education, Quiet, Connection and Nature this new "sanctuary" is in harmony and complements the missions of the neighboring Arboretum and Ag hall and the surrounding Island Community. So to reiterate....I support the Still Point Project as proposed.

Thank you for your time

Caitlin Jones
Mermaid Farm and Dairy,
Chilmark MA
September 2022

The following are my own additional ideas and suggestions for this project...

1. No dogs or pets especially near the Mill Brook to protect otters and water birds. Many people are terrified of dogs also.
2. Maybe the project could include a place for some, (4-10 ?), off island/island attendees to "camp" for a short duration on the lawn near the barn. The barn infrastructure could include a simple (seasonal?) kitchen and outdoor shower/ (water the garden ...grey water system?) as well as maybe electric bikes for transportation. I have attended many similar in theme, "nature retreats" off island and the ability to camp promotes a depth of diversity and community unavailable where finding affordable lodging is cost

prohibitive for many people. In addition, camping without many extra “amenities” deepened the impact of the retreat in nature and with each other.

3. I’m sure this is happening but a plan for a bicycle /hiking trail that includes the whole region: Polly Hill, Ag Hall, Pan Handle, Wascosims, Seven Gates, and also protects the wild integrity of the Woods Preserve should be kept in mind as infrastructure / parking/ housing is built out in this region.
4. Food Forests, more garden space could be part of the landscaping plan for the project.
5. Limit/Ban use of fertilizer and insecticides.
6. Utilize ruminant animals to “mow’ the green space where possible
7. Compost.
8. Minimize outside lights
9. (Very controversial) consider freeing and restoring the pre colonial mill stream waterway.....

Dear West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals:

September 4, 2022

I am writing to support Thomas Bena as his project, Stillpoint, makes its way through your process.

Thomas has worked hard for several years to bring this to fruition and I hope you will all vote to help him go forward with the plan he has in place. What he has accomplished so far is to reverse the effects of decisions by the MVC and the WT planning board that would have allowed 13 homes with all their attendant guesthouses, swimming pools, septic systems and so much more. To reduce that to 4 buildable lots with two lots already occupied by pre-existing homes and only an existing barn on the remaining two for the foreseeable future, is a gift to us all. That Thomas has done all this without any pressure from the MVC or any other public body is truly remarkable.

At a time when everyone else who appears before you seems to be trying to maximize their project I hope you see this project as a breath of fresh air and speed it in its way.

Thank you,

Chris Murphy

September 14, 2022

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing to express my support for the Stillpoint project. Thomas Bena's thorough presentation describes the project and answers questions about the traditional measures Boards look for when evaluating the impact and viability of a project... the number of participants, traffic studies, etc. I want to focus/expand on two other essential aspects of the project:

Environmental Impact:

In 1988 the MVC approved a 52 acre, 13 lot development. In 2008, Claudia Miller purchased the land and in 2021 she put the land on the market and invited Thomas Bena to develop a plan that replaces the 13-house subdivision with 4 entities: Stillpoint, the Land Bank and the 2 existing private homes. Thomas purchased 14 acres and the barn to house Stillpoint. The Land Bank purchased 26 acres of open land with walking trails for public use abutting Crockers Pond. The additional 13 acres with two houses has sold to private owners. Anything leaching into the land (known as the Mill Brook Water Shed) goes into the Island's fragile watershed. Imagine the environmental impact of 13 houses with septic systems leaching nitrogen into the soil. I love the slogan, "There's no planet B".

Social benefits:

Read the newspaper, listen to the radio, watch the TV news and there's no question there's conflict in the world which is hurting us all. It's happening around the world and also on Martha's Vineyard. Stillpoint offers a solution to this problem providing a space that offers classes and fosters contemplation and conversation. Having attended a Conflict Transformation course at the School for International Training in VT (with 64 participants from 32 countries like Bosnia, Sri Lanka, and Rwanda) I have first-hand experience of how important and valuable it is to learn the skills of having difficult conversations which is at the core of Stillpoint's mission.

Please take the positive environmental factors and social benefits into account when you are making your decision on Stillpoint. They could be factors that will decide the future of MV. I urge you to approve the Stillpoint project.

All the best,

Cynthia Doyle

To whom it may concern,

As the previous owner of the property known as Stillpoint in West Tisbury, MV, I want to express, in this note, my complete support of the efforts and ideas of Thomas Bena, who purchased the barn and some acreage of this beautiful property.

For many years Mr Bena and I have shared many thoughts and ideas about how to enhance, create and protect life, nature and culture on this wonderful island. When he approached me expressing the wish to buy some of the land available, I was thrilled. I knew immediately that our synergy was unique and world views could not be more in line. He understood what my goal and intentions were for this property then and for its future.

There was no doubt we wanted the majority of the land in conservation, to preserve plants and wildlife and give the public some access to observe and enjoy the its beauty.

We both felt that an educational component would be important, workshops and classes during the year and other small events, which would bring some full-time and some summer residents together, to learn, celebrate, discuss and enjoy this special community.

I trust Mr. Bena and his sensitivities for this property, the land and its neighbors to create a responsible and sustainable entity for the benefit of everyone on this island.

Sincerely
Claudia Miller

To The Member of the West Tisbury ZBA,

My name is Eric Adams and I am a Marriage and Family Therapist, business owner and year-round resident of the island for the past 20 years and am writing to convey my strong and enthusiastic support for the "Stillpoint Plan" that is currently under the ZBA's consideration.

As a practicing mental health professional, I can attest to the increasing need for community spaces dedicated to facilitating and maintaining the health and wellness of our island community. Stillpoint provides a centrally located and naturally magnificent setting for both year-round and seasonal residents and guests to develop and practice the skills and tools necessary to achieve greater wellness and deeper connection with self and community.

Stillpoint has the potential to offer psycho-educational, spiritual and natural/ holistic programming from islanders and our unique and talented summer guests, to those within our community who need it most.

I thank you in advance for your careful consideration in this important matter.

Sincerely,

W. Eric Adams

Anna Fitch and Banker White
37 Stillpoint Meadows Road
West Tisbury, MA 02575

415.999.8578
510.325.5032

August 4, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

We are writing to express our overwhelming support for the Stillpoint Martha's Vineyard, Inc. project. As the closest abutters to the project, we understand that the barn will be used as an educational space for our community. We are comfortable with that and looking forward to utilizing the space ourselves. Thomas has been open and communicative with us about his plans and we have full confidence he will balance the needs of what he is doing for the larger island community with the local neighbors that will be affected by the change in land use.

We are a year-round family with two kids starting at the West Tisbury school this fall. As community members, we are excited to see what he and the Stillpoint team will offer, less than 100 yards from our front door. As filmmakers, we are very familiar with Mr. Bena's work at MVFF and believe his work is in the best interest of the community we are now a part of.

Sincerely,

Anna & Banker

Dear commissioners and board members,

I write as a West Tisbury resident to support the proposed use of the property known as Stillpoint as a community resource and gathering place for contemplative educational activities and discussions.

The existing barn structure is fortuitously fit for purpose and I am certain that the professionals employed for the design of the needed minor modifications and increased parking will be especially sensitive to the beautiful site and will work to ensure minimal impact.

I hope that the Board and Commission will find swift consensus for approval of phase one so that island residents can soon enjoy the benefits of a charming and inspiring new gathering place.

Sincerely,
Geraldine Brooks
16 Mill Road
West Tisbury

.

south
mountain
C O M P A N Y

TO: West Tisbury ZBA
FROM: John Abrams, South Mountain Company
DATE: September 5, 2022
RE: Stillpoint Project

I am writing to express our support for the Stillpoint Project being proposed by Thomas Bena and his organization. Having been responsible for the original design and construction of the barn for Claudia Miller, we at South Mountain find it gratifying to see the new use now being proposed, which couldn't be more appropriate.

We feel that the development plan is sensitive, thoughtful, and low impact. It's an exemplary project that has been assembled by a good team. It will be, we're certain, a tremendous benefit to the property, to the neighborhood, to the town, to the island.

We especially appreciate the potential for a new kind of gathering space in that intends to promote discourse about town and island issues. It will, we're certain, be a great addition to West Tisbury in multiple ways.

Thank you for your consideration.

September 2, 2022

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing this letter in favor of the Stillpoint Martha's Vineyard project. After careful consideration, I believe that Stillpoint will be a welcome addition to the island community. The teachings, meditations, and viewpoints offered will be a needed guide for all people. I am hoping that the design and planning will go well so that the barn may move forward to get the necessary improvements needed.

Respectfully,



Julianne Vanderhoop

Aquinnah Selectperson

Member of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head/Aquinnah

September 4, 2022

To The West Tisbury ZBA Members,

Please consider my letter in full support of the Stillpoint Project in West Tisbury. I am a resident of Chilmark, a local photographer and have known Thomas Bena and his family quite well over the years. Mr. Bena set out on this project to offer our Vineyard community a small and intimate gathering place, a wellness center for the benefit of all. I have visited Stillpoint on several occasions with Mr. Bena and have seen and heard firsthand his commitment to the conservation of this property. He holds the well-being of Martha's Vineyard and its residents front of mind, as his history of involvement in the conservation movement here attests. I know he will be a responsible steward of this project guarding the peaceful and wholesome environment at Stillpoint with his clear vision and skillful leadership.

It is my hope that the West Tisbury ZBA approves the Stillpoint Project.

Thank you,

Larry Glick
Chilmark, MA

August 4, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

When I think about Thomas Bena's *Stillpoint* project, Dionne Warwick's tune "What The World Needs Now is Love..." floats into my head. When I access that place within myself where I can find calm, I am able to see the beauty in other humans and the magic of nature that surrounds me.

I feel incredibly fortunate to know that a place like *Stillpoint* exists just down the road from my home and that the space will be available to the public. My family looks forward to seeing how Thomas' vision coupled with Land Bank supervision will evolve and give back to the Island Community.

Thank you for supporting this gift to West Tisbury and beyond.

Gratefully,

Lynne Whiting
985 State Road
West Tisbury, Ma.
02575

To Whom it May Concern,

August 5, 2022

I strongly encourage the support of the Stillpoint project.

From a conservation standpoint, it is the epitome of both ecological and cultural conservation - ecological, in that it removed this pristine land from being developed and is giving it back to the public for use, both in Stillpoint itself and in the Land Bank deal which was always an aspect of the project from its inception. It is also cultural conservation in that it is taking what would certainly have been turned into wealthy houses, further eroding the cultural traits of the island, and instead is creating a place for quiet and thoughtful discussion.

The island needs Stillpoint, as currently there are few forums for real discussion of the island's most pressing issues as we watch the island become what the outside world has always thought of it as - a parking space for wealth and an endless series of money-exchanging cocktail parties. As a born and raised life-long islander, I feel the need for Stillpoint is more pressing now than ever.

Tom Ellis

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of Thomas Bena's proposed collaboration at Stillpoint in West Tisbury.

His thoughtful and deliberate approach to the project has been very impressive as he is dealing with a very sensitive natural habitat and a sensitive community.

Thomas has displayed a dedication to his community and to the arts while founding and running MVFF. The evolution of his approach to building community was beautiful to watch as MVFF's mission grew and their goals changed. What Thomas is proposing at Stillpoint is an important step in the right direction for our island seeing that a proposed sub-division would be thwarted and a gathering space for the community will be incubated.

What I love more than anything about Thomas's ideas for Stillpoint is that after decades of unprecedented technological advances there are still people like him who are questioning these advances and making strides to create new opportunities for intimate connections on a human scale. As we take on global and local problems together, Stillpoint would provide our island and its community members a truly unique opportunity to do so in an idyllic and inspired space.

Thomas has created a wonderful team, as he has in the past, to help him execute this vision and I hope for the Islands sake that he is able to achieve all that he has set out to achieve.

Sincerely,
Chris Fischer

DANIEL WATERS
P.O. Box 595
West Tisbury, MA 02575
508-560-2011

3 September 2022

To the West Tisbury Zoning Board:

I am writing to express my fullest possible support for the Stillpoint/Land Bank plan to share and use the 40-acre property on State Road in West Tisbury that is currently under discussion.

If you have been following recent and ongoing discussions by the Select Board and the Howes House committee, you will be aware that there is a groundswell of concern over the lack of community gathering spaces — a need that the West Tisbury Library alone cannot meet, and that is only partially addressed by the Grange Hall and the Ag Hall (both of which are heavily restricted by the Town as to the types and frequency of use). Although the Howes House property was donated to the Town for use as a recreation center, it can't be substantially enlarged and is likely to remain mainly for use by seniors.

Stillpoint presents a chance to relieve the pressure currently concentrated on our town's few available meeting spaces. It will provide a flexible, low-impact venue for meetings, events, lectures and more. I commend Thomas Bena and his team for pledging to keep this property accessible to community-based organizations and individuals wishing to bring people together for exactly the kinds of things that strengthen us as a town: conversations, and the sharing of local talent and ideas.

The Stillpoint/Land Bank proposal is respectful of both the environment *and* the town's cultural life. It's an example of humans doing something *right*. I hope you will recognize this and encourage more such projects by approving this one with as much enthusiasm as possible.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Waters', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dan Waters

September 3, 2022

To: West Tisbury ZBA

Re: Stillpoint

In reference to the proposed plan for the property known as Stillpoint, in West Tisbury, I would like to voice my wholehearted support. Having been a believer in the Land Bank since its inception, my family and I have walked many of the beautiful tracts of land that have been saved from development over these many years. Having known and worked with Thomas Bena for many of the past 20 years, I trust him, and have great faith in his vision. This plan, in conjunction with that of the Land Bank, will protect this most valuable expanse in the heart of West Tisbury, as well as provide a welcoming space for gathering and dialogue. For those of us who value the natural world-the soil, the water *and* the humans-bringing together these elements in this perfectly named place can only be a win for all.

Respectfully,
Dana Nunes

Frank H Dunkl
P O Box 445
Vineyard Haven, MA 02568

August 28, 2022

Re: Stillpoint Project
West Tisbury, MA

Dear Commissioners or Board Members,

As a Mass Licensed and DEP trained Water Systems Operator (now retired), and one who is educated and experienced in wetlands issues, I would like to offer my opinions on this project as follows;

1. Given that there are extensive clay layers in this area, I feel that there is little chance that it would materially affect the nearby wetlands.
2. I don't believe that surface drainage is an issue because of the distance to wetlands and the fact that the land here is comparatively level.
3. A well, adequate for the needs of those using the facilities, will have to be located far enough from the parking areas and septic system to comply with regulations.
4. The plan calls for minimal removal of trees and clearing of land. The barn is there, and parking will occur along the existing road, so environmental impacts will be limited.
5. I understand that activities will involve indoor lectures, classes and discussions. There has been no mention of any proposed events involving highly amplified music or other noises. Therefore, I do not envision that "noise pollution" would be a valid objection to this project.
6. The types of uses for which the property and facilities will be used are important for their educational and cultural value. Thomas Bena will ensure that the operation of Stillpoint is in keeping with certain standards. I know him well, and have full confidence in him. He will always do what is in the interests of the community.
7. Since this is a "low-density" area, with few people living nearby, I don't see "light pollution" from cars exiting after an event as being a valid objection. Every housing development produces far more noise, traffic and light pollution than will Stillpoint.
8. In evaluating this proposal, we should remain objective, and avoid using "double standards". It is our responsibility to do what we believe to be in the community interest.

Frank H Dunkl

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to voice my full support for the Stillpoint initiative. I believe this will be a tremendous asset for our community for many years to come. I have known Mr. Bena for years and have observed how he works with diligence to make sure that his efforts have maximum benefit for the community in a conscientious manner. I have no doubt that this center will be a well-run location that enhances the cultural and spiritual fabric of the island. I look forward to enjoying the programs and events that will take place at this wonderful gift of a center.

Sincerely,

Julian Wise
West Tisbury

12 August 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

I can't think of something more needed in rural communities today than places that offer lifelong learning opportunities for its neighbors and visitors. I feel that on Martha's Vineyard this is even more important to prioritize than in more urban centers with lots of cultural and educational institutions already in place. There are many rural communities in our country that experience the "brain drain" phenomenon where the youth choose not to return to their hometowns with their skills after receiving a higher education because home doesn't offer opportunities for them to grow and strive as human beings. That has been happening in northeast Pennsylvania where I grew up for generations. We have one of the highest geriatric rates on the east coast and believe me it's not because of the weather or the golf courses.

I have been on the vineyard for over twenty years, and I have always said that the one thing that would make it absolutely perfect would be if there were a college or some sort of graduate program here where one to continue to learn things and master new skills. I personally have taken full advantage of many of the educational resources available here. I am and have been an avid participant in Ace MV programming. I've done everything from take courses in writing, religious studies, history and business to more hands-on adventures such as learning to cook Italian and Indian food and make homemade pasta.

I also spent many years attending the bodhi path mediation center, learning how to meditate. I have taken many classes at the yoga barn and the YMCA and done plenty of deep dives into nutrition and healing with Dr. Oceana Rams and different island healers of all sorts. I consider myself a lifelong learner and enjoy very much trying to become a better person. Believe me, I still have plenty of work to do and I feel that the Stillpoint Project will very much aid me in my quest. It's mission and core values speak directly to my calling and purpose. Rather than just taking a class to pass time during the long winter months, I feel this project will offer opportunities that I have wished were possible on Martha's Vineyard for decades.

My family and I spend most of our free time together out in nature. Oddly with all the beaches and trails, my kids are absolutely obsessed with Polly Hill Arboretum. My husband and I often discuss/ debate what it is about the place that just makes our kids so happy. After countless theories, we decided that it's not one thing but many things; It's primarily the layout but it's also the setting, the diversity of species and the quiet coziness of the space that make my kids feel so at home there. Even though Polly passed away many years ago, you can almost feel her intentions on the breeze as you stroll about the property. You somehow know that she wanted you to enjoy, to be at peace, to be free of your burdens, to be happy, curious, and intrigued. You can almost feel her smiling back at you when you stare in awe at the beauty of her magnolia trees.

I have no doubt in my mind that Jake, Thomas, and their team will create their own smiling back space that will be cherished by our community for generations and generations to come. A space that inspires, a space that ignites, a space that is safe and cozy yet thought provoking and heart opening, an inclusive space, a space for everyone. A big quiet tent and I personally can't wait to seek refuge there but also push myself there, learn there, join with friends there and build community there.

As Always,

Robyn Athearn

To Whom It May Concern:

I wish to offer a letter in support of the new Stillpoint project. I was offered a chance to review the plan and was very pleased with the collaboration of trusted people, the careful and thoughtful use of resources and clear dedication to a worthy mission makes me feel very supportive of the project.

The impacts of concern that we all look at in projects seem to be smartly minimized without taking away from the mission. So as a West Tisbury resident and hopefully patron of this new venture I encourage you to help it through the planning process.

I think it's a further benefit to note that while artists, poets and thinkers have always been drawn to the Vineyard so have many other leaders of their respective communities and champions of industry come here to wind down and reflect on life. The opportunity to learn and use the skills presented here is an important opportunity for mindfulness, reflection and stillness that can lead to the clarity needed to make great decisions.

I wholeheartedly support this effort, thank you for receiving my letter.

Simon Athearn

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I wholeheartedly support this effort, thank you for receiving my letter.

Simon Athearn

PO Box 244
West Tisbury MA 02575

August 6, 2022

To the West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals:

I am writing this letter of support for Thomas Bena's project, Stillpoint, in West Tisbury. I have known Thomas for close to thirty years as a community member, the creator of the Martha's Vineyard Film Festival, and as a passionate advocate for many issues that are important to preserving and enriching our lives on the Vineyard.

As the former director of the West Tisbury Free Public Library, I am keenly aware of how important it is for us all to have a place to come together to freely discuss and explore issues, including those that may divide us. It is exactly this idea that is at the core of the Stillpoint project. Thomas envisions a place that is open to all for such discussions, as well as for workshops, retreats, and the arts.

I know that Thomas has worked for years to pull together this plan. I have seen the dedication and solid stewardship that he devotes to the projects that he has been part of and I have every confidence that this project is no different.

I look forward to seeing this project unfold and I know that it will be an important addition to our community.

Sincerely,

Beth Kramer

5 August, 2022

Dear Zoning Board of Appeals, West Tisbury,

Thank you for the work you do to protect and support our island Community. I am sure you do this because you care about this community, and I imagine it can sometimes be a thankless job.

I have been a resident in Chilmark for twelve years, and both of my children have graduated from Chilmark school. As summer visitors, my family has cherished the island as a refuge for five generations now. My parents were married here, as were my wife and I. I cherish this place and this unique island community, as I know you do.

I am concerned about the increasing divides in our community: economic, political, cultural, and more. Given the environmental and social challenges we are facing, now is a time when we need to learn to reach across divides, and see the common humanity in each other, even when we disagree. I want to do my part in that.

Just before the pandemic Thomas Bena and I collaborated on a discussion series that used quiet as a tool to bring conversations deeper. The idea for the series, named *Inwards*, drew in part on my background in Buddhist meditation and philosophy. In those conversations, I was really inspired by how fewer words, and more moments of silence, helped create conversations that connected people across divides. Seeing the kind of learning that is possible in that space of stillness was part of what moved Thomas to embark on the Stillpoint project, and also what brought me to collaborate with him as an advisor on this project.

I would also be honored to offer meditation classes and day-long retreats at Stillpoint. I have been training in insight meditation for the past thirty years, including time as a monk and translator in Burma (Myanmar). I have been teaching around the world for the past 10 years, but had not felt there was a really suitable place for me to teach on the island. With its natural sense of sanctuary, Stillpoint is a perfect place for me to bring this home.

Please do support the success of the Stillpoint project in any way that you are able. Our community needs it.

Sincerely,
Jake Davis
Chilmark



Jennifer Randolph
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
The Northeast Native Network of Kinship and Healing Inc.
jen@kinshipheals.org
508-663-3874

August 2, 2022

Dear West Tisbury ZBA:

I am writing to express our support of the Stillpoint plan on State Road in West Tisbury. As an island native non-profit, our mission is to use tribal cultural and traditional ways of teaching to create safe spaces for people. Our program activities include a youth group for native girls, traditional 3 Sister teaching Gardens, therapeutic / traditional art and music class for healing, and traditional nature teachings. In addition to providing this much needed support to the tribal community we will also be working with the general public and non-native service providers both on and off island to provide cultural competency education.

Kinship Heals and Stillpoint's relationship is a reflection of our work. Stillpoint allowing space for tribal people, a tribal organization sharing knowledge, and both working together to create a healthier community for everyone.

Additionally at the very heart of Kinship Heals is restoring relationship between people, animals, land and water. The land and energy of Stillpoint is something that should be respected and protected. There have been studies done in the work of native American sexual assault advocacy and it is an industry accepted truth that the best form of healing for indigenous people is through their culture. There is no bigger piece of our culture than our relationship to earth and water. In my experience having access to quiet, natural spaces such as Stillpoint are vital not just to indigenous people trying to heal, but to all humans. I truly hope and look forward to be able to share indigenous knowledge in how we are all connected and how we can be in good relations with each other. Now more than ever, with climate change, sea level rising, and shifting political emergencies we need to figure out how to start living in balance. I believe the Stillpoint project is a perfect place to start.

Yours truly,
Jennifer Randolph

Dear West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals,

As someone who grew up in West Tisbury, and has since moved back to raise a family in this same town, I want to express my support for the Stillpoint Project. We all know how important community is to the Vineyard, and I believe this project will help support and strengthen it by providing a year round place to gather that is accessible to all. I shudder to think of what this land would have become without the efforts of Thomas Bena and others who succeeded in conserving it and opening it up for the public's benefit. West Tisbury is lacking in gathering spaces, and while we have some wonderful options that suit special occasions, this project has the potential to become a staple in the community where we can all meet up, have enriching discussions and programs and connect in a more in-depth and meaningful way. I encourage you to support this project.

Sincerely,

-Ollie Becker