

STILLPOINT

June 28, 2023

Dear members of the West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals,

We are grateful for the productive meeting on June 8th. We particularly appreciate your desire to bring a spirit of working together with us for the common good. In that spirit, we are happy to provide further documentation on the parking spaces, and other such areas you may request within the scope of site plan review.

By this letter, we would like to offer clarification on a number of points that came up at the June 8 hearing.

Educational Use.

First, we are not a commercial use. We are an “Educational/Charitable/Religious” use, which is allowed under Section 3.1 of the West Tisbury Zoning Bylaw in the RU District and is subject only to site plan review consistent with the footnote to the Table of Uses, which states “Subject to limitations on municipal regulations in G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 3.” The ZBA (not the Planning Board) is the site plan review board because our proposed use contains more than 1,500 square feet.

A further area that seems to be of concern is the proposed rental of the barn to outside groups to provide income for Stillpoint’s educational mission. All Stillpoint events will further our educational mission. The vast majority—at least 80 percent—will be educational events themselves. To help raise funds for our educational mission, the MVC has allowed that up to 20% of events at Stillpoint may consist of rentals to groups outside of our educational mission. This does not constitute a “for profit” enterprise, does not convert Stillpoint to a commercial use, and suggestions otherwise are incorrect.

All events will comply with applicable rules, regulations, and bylaws in West Tisbury and all MVC conditions. Our policy is to give priority to events that

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welcome a diverse range of political, ethnic, and socio-economic viewpoints. Stillpoint will not be available to groups promoting racism or violence.

If there are specific groups or specific types of events that the ZBA is concerned about Stillpoint renting to, please provide us with a list of those specific types so that we may consider how to respond in advance of the July 6th meeting.

Evolving Project.

We do not shy away from the allegation that our project has evolved in the nearly 12 months since filing our initial application, because the evolution has been in response to the good faith concerns of the community. For example, at the MVC, we offered a condition prohibiting weddings at the barn, which was directly responsive to concerns voiced by members of the West Tisbury Planning Board.

In addition, the projected level of usage has decreased over the permitting process; suggestions otherwise are inaccurate. Our initial plans for the number, frequency, and size of events would have totaled 43,000 attendees per year. Using these numbers, the Traffic Impact Assessment (“TIA”) found only a “minimal” impact on traffic on the roads around Stillpoint. We have since agreed to an annual limit on attendees of 38,000, set by the MVC, which is a meaningful reduction from 43,000.

Comparison to Alternative Uses.

We believe that the Stillpoint project will be a benefit to the community and will further, rather than impede, regional conservation goals as well as the Town’s planning goals. In the decades that Claudia Miller owned and the property, no one raised the funds to purchase the entire subdivision and put it into permanent conservation. In order to avoid selling the subdivision to a developer, Ms. Miller encouraged Thomas Bena to put together a deal combining Stillpoint’s educational project with a discounted Land Bank purchase (please see attorney John Moore’s letter to the MVC, on the DRI website [here](#)). We strongly believe that any detriment caused by inviting

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the Vineyard community onto the property to engage in educational programming would pale in comparison to the detriments from a 12-lot subdivision of private homes.

Moreover, those detriments—the traffic, destruction of habitat, the nitrogen load to the watershed from 12 Title 5 systems—would have been solely for the benefit of a few families, rather than for the whole community. Instead of that, due to Ms. Miller’s generosity, and the deal with the Land Bank, the Island community will have the benefit of an educational gathering space for classes, conversation, and contemplation, as well as acres of conservation land.

What If Stillpoint Fails?

We would like to note, respectfully, that some information requested at the recent meeting is not within the scope of zoning review. For instance, Stillpoint’s economic feasibility is not a land use issue and therefore, should not be an issue before the ZBA .

Nonetheless, it is understandable that there would be concern about what happens to these parcels if Stillpoint fails and has to sell the lots. The MVC addressed this issue directly. The MVC conditions specify that, without MVC approval, the lots could be sold for residential uses, as per the 1988 subdivision, or they may be sold for conservation purposes. Beyond that, any change in use, intensification of use, and all further development, would require MVC approval.

Sincerely,

The Stillpoint Team

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