

Stillpoint Narrative

Stillpoint Martha's Vineyard, Inc., a tax-exempt educational organization, is partnering with the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank to acquire a 40-acre parcel of land in West Tisbury, with the intention of opening it to the Vineyard community. The parcel, which includes a barn, abuts the Polly Hill Arboretum, the Francis Newhall Woods Nature Preserve, Seven Gates Farm, and Crocker Pond.

"This important tract of land sits in the Mill Brook watershed. Conserving large parts of it protects drinking water, habitat, and the Tisbury Great Pond," says James Lengyel, land bank executive director.

The land bank, in collaboration with the Land Protection Fund, a new initiative to increase collaborative land protection, will preserve the hiking trails and vistas along Crocker Pond and near Priestester's Pond, conserving 26 of the 40 acres.

"This project epitomizes what is needed to ensure the Vineyard's future in the face of climate change and relentless development—collaboration among landowners with great foresight, public agencies, nonprofits, and engaged private supporters to keep the Island's land and waters intact for the benefit of nature and the entire community," says David Foster, author of *A Meeting of Land and Sea: Nature and the Future of Martha's Vineyard*.

Ben Robinson, who has been an essential part of the team planning Stillpoint, believes, "These days, when considering any sort of development, there needs to be a responsibility to do as little as possible—in terms of energy, material, and land use. Not only are both organizations buying land with development restrictions, together they are preserving 40 acres of land for public use—in perpetuity! And importantly, an existing, privately owned, solar-powered, state-of-the-art barn is being repurposed for community use."

Stillpoint Martha's Vineyard, Inc., founded by Thomas Bena, will repurpose the barn to create a gathering place for educational offerings including but not limited to classes, discussions, meditation, and the arts. Mr. Bena is the former founder and creative director of the Martha's Vineyard Film Festival (MVFF).

In 2019, Jake Davis, a key advisor for Stillpoint, offered to collaborate with Mr. Bena (then at the MVFF) on a discussion series that would use quiet, rather than film, as a tool to bring conversations deeper. The idea for the series, named *Inwards*, drew in part on Mr. Daviss' background in Buddhist meditation and philosophy.

“Working with Thomas and our group of collaborators on *Inwards*, I was so 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 on this,” says Mr. Davis.

The property, which had been approved as a 13-lot subdivision, was purchased in 2008 by Claudia Miller and also includes two privately owned, historic homes (one built in 1714) and ten acres of undeveloped private land.

For almost two decades, Ms. Miller supported Mr. Bena’s efforts to bring the Island community together for important cultural, political, and environmental conversations inspired or provoked by film. Now, with this new vision for the barn, the community can continue to gather, in a preserved natural setting. “I’m thrilled that the land bank will protect more than half of the land and grateful that Thomas will put the barn to good use,” said Ms. Miller.

“Without Claudia, none of this would be possible. She had the original vision to transform a 13-lot subdivision into a magical place to walk, be quiet, and enjoy nature. With the help of the land bank and the Land Protection Fund, we are simply ensuring her vision, and making it available for future generations,” says Bena.

Stillpoint is an educational non-profit providing a community space for classes, conversation, and contemplation. At least 80% of Stillpoint’s events will fall within this educational mission. These will include

Classes, such as decoy carving.

Conversations, such as *Inwards* (see narrative above).

Contemplation such as a day-long meditation retreat.

To raise funding for our educational mission, up to 20% of our events may be off-mission. These may include birthday gatherings, fundraisers, and other activities. As per MVC conditions, these will not include weddings.

All events shall comply with all applicable rules, regulations, and bylaws in the Town of West Tisbury and all MVC conditions (attached below).

Martha's Vineyard Commission Conditions on Events at Stillpoint
(as written in the May 18, 2023 Decision of the MVC on DRI 279-M)

1. Events held on the property shall be subject to the following conditions:
 - a. Events with 35 attendees or fewer – not more than 5 in any one day.
 - b. Events with 36 to 100 attendees – not more than 3 in any one week.
 - c. No more than 20% of all events may be off-mission.
 - d. No more than 38,000 attendees per year.
 - e. No weddings will be permitted.

An “event” is a gathering of ten or more attendees for a common purpose. An “attendee” includes staff, guests, and any other person on the premises for an event. Events include sponsored events and other activities occurring on the premises.

2. The Applicant shall keep records of the frequency of events, including the entity or entities associated with each event, the basic nature of each event, and the number of attendees per event. These records shall be provided to the Commission every six months during the first two years that events occur at the site.
3. There shall be no outdoor amplification, except as may be required to comply with ADA requirements. Indoor amplification shall be limited to that needed for films and people speaking at events, and quiet recorded music. Amplified sound as measured at any property boundary shall not exceed 5 dB(A) above ambient as measured at the same time.
4. As offered, events may be offered daily from 7AM, but shall cease at 10PM.
5. As offered, no overnight accommodations (including tents) may be provided or permitted on lot 4.11.
6. As offered, the sale of alcohol is prohibited on the premises.
7. As offered, Stillpoint will work with the West Tisbury Police Chief to determine if a traffic detail is required and for what duration, based on the timing of events and expected number of attendees.
8. As offered, there shall be no more than 60 vehicles parked onsite at one time. This includes the 40 proposed parking spaces along the access road, plus overflow parking for 20 vehicles. A plan for the 20 overflow spaces, including any required clearing, shall be submitted to the LUPC for review and approval prior to receipt of a Certificate of Occupancy.
9. As offered, Stillpoint shall not permit attendees at activities on the Stillpoint property to enter the Polly Hill Arboretum property from the Stillpoint property unless Stillpoint has received prior written permission from Polly Hill Arboretum for said entry.

