

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

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To the Martha's Vineyard Commission:

I'm writing to amplify and reinforce my message of November 17th, and to elaborate beyond the three-minute limit that was imposed at that meeting. 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 Martha's Vineyard Commissioners and 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', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Dan Waters
West Tisbury