

West Tisbury delays housing bank decision

COVID booster mandate to wait; New planning board member appointed.

By **Eunki Seonwoo** - December 9, 2021



West Tisbury select board chair Skipper Manter leads Wednesday's Zoom meeting.

The West Tisbury select board decided to wait for the Coalition to Create the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank (CCMVHB) to edit their proposal before voting whether to add it to the annual town meeting's warrant article.

During last week's meeting, the board decided to wait to hear what town counsel Ron Rappaport would say to the Edgartown select board about the housing bank proposal. The Edgartown select board also decided to delay their decision on the housing bank until further details were clarified. So far, Chilmark and Aquinnah have agreed to add the housing bank article to their warrants, while Oak Bluffs and Tisbury have yet to hear the pitch.

Alongside the housing bank proposal, West Tisbury select board chair Skipper Manter said coalition coordinator Laura Silber sent the board a "sequential process" for the local housing bank legislation. Manter said this cleared up some questions, but also raised other ones.

"Just in general, again, I'm in favor of this housing bank. But, how it's being put together, I think you're setting yourself up for failure in trying to get this off the ground," Manter said.

"It's important to get a handle on the overall process," West Tisbury select board member Cynthia Mitchell said.

John Abrams, a member of the housing bank coalition, said Edgartown authorized Rappaport to work with CCMVHB's lawyers to amend the issues he raised.

Mitchell said modeling the housing bank legislation closer to the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank's warrant article when it was approved in 1986 would be better, including the structure.

Abrams agreed with the notion.

Mitchell also voiced other concerns about the housing bank, such as the \$1 million threshold potentially not taking into account the future value of the dollar or whether setting the income eligibility 240% of the area median income was too high, among others.

Abrams said these worries are being taken into account. The coalition is aware the threshold needs to go up over time. Additionally, Abrams said there was a reason the income eligibility was so high.

"One of the things about 240% is that it's consistent with the [state] legislation that is moving forward...the reason it's so high is because there is a tremendous amount of recognition right now that when you get...[for example] a police officer and a librarian in the same household, they are shut out of the real estate market. This would bring them in," Abrams said. He said the percentage can change depending on a family's situation. Additionally, the homes will be for year-round residents.

The West Tisbury board has until February to accept the warrant article, and the coalition will come back once the "inconsistencies" in the warrant article and more specific details are added.

In other business, West Tisbury health agent Omar Johnson recommended to the board wait before making a COVID booster shot mandate for town employees. Manter said town employees were mandated to receive the COVID vaccine in order to work in town buildings.

"To date, we have the vaccination requirements in place. You know, it's evident that these have been effective. There haven't been any breakouts or clusters or anything related to the employees or any of the places in the town that people frequent," Johnson said. "I did some research and found that neither the CDC [Center for Disease Control and Prevention], DPH [Massachusetts Department of Public Health], and experts in the field advocate making boosters a requirement at this time. They all cite one reason, that we need to follow the data for a bit longer."

Johnson said the board should wait before making a booster mandate. If a booster mandate for the general population or if the COVID cases on the Island become a "matter of concern," that is

when Johnson thinks a booster mandate would be appropriate.

Manter and Mitchell were both worried about the safety of the employees from people who may come into town hall infected with COVID and the concerns regarding the omicron variant. However, they agreed to go along with Johnson's recommendation to wait.

The board unanimously voted for West Tisbury zoning board of appeals associate member Casey Decker to disclose his relationship with Schofield, Barbini & Hoehn, where he is a subcontractor, when projects he played a part in appear before the zoning board. This came forward because of a "disclosure of appearance of conflict of interest" form Decker submitted to the select board.

White Brothers-Lynch Corporation won the contract for the Tiah's Cove Road culvert project. West Tisbury town administrator Jennifer Rand said the bid was \$99,904. Construction is scheduled to begin after March 1 and to be completed before April 30. The residents in the surrounding area will be given a week's notice prior to the beginning of construction.

Meanwhile, West Tisbury planning board member Henry Geller moved to western Massachusetts, leaving an empty space on the board. The West Tisbury planning board recommended voting in associate member Amy Upton to fill his spot for the remainder of his term. A planning board member receives \$1,000 per year as a stipend, which comes down to around \$10 an hour, according to planning board member Leah Smith. The West Tisbury planning board and the select board unanimously approved the appointment in a joint vote.