

Edgartown delays housing bank article again

Smadbeck balks at stipends, steering committee to meet with Rappaport.

By **Brian Dowd** - December 28, 2021



Select board member Arthur Smadbeck voiced strong opposition to stipends for housing bank commissioners. — Gabrielle Mannino

A little more fine tuning.

That's what the Edgartown select board would like to see before they're ready to put the proposed housing bank article on the town's annual town meeting warrant.

At a meeting Monday, board members told members of the Coalition to Create the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank's steering committee to take another week and work with Ron Rappaport, who is town counsel for five of the Island's six towns, to iron out the article's fine print.

This is the third time the town's highest elected officials delayed putting the article on the warrant. The steering committee has been making the rounds at Island towns to place its article on each warrant. Tisbury, Chilmark, and Aquinnah have placed the article on their warrants as West Tisbury, Oak Bluffs, and Edgartown have yet to do so.

One of the major sticking points of the discussion in Edgartown was the possibility of stipends for housing

bank commissioners.

The proposed housing bank article does not outline commissioner stipends. Instead it leaves the door open in the future for the town advisory boards to determine stipends to expand public participation should they want to.

Select board member Arthur Smadbeck was strongly opposed to any idea of a stipend saying funds should be going toward affordable housing not commissioners.

“Land Bank commissioners aren’t paid, in fact to my knowledge no regional body commissioners are paid. I really don’t like that,” Smadbeck said. “I don’t like taking the public money and paying the people who are going to determine for themselves what they’re going to get paid. It’s bad.”

Laura Silber, coalition coordinator, clarified that the town advisory boards, through a unanimous vote, would determine stipends, not commissioners.

John Abrams, a member of the steering committee, said the idea was to allow the option for a small stipend to pay for child care or other expenses to encourage younger and or more diverse people to serve on the commission.

“If Land Bank commissioners could have a stipend for expenses and child care, if Martha’s Vineyard commissioners could, we might get younger people actually serving on these boards,” Abrams said. “This is a real problem and we are not addressing it well. All of our rooms are filled with people like us ... Only if all the town advisory boards, all of them, feel like this is a good idea, at least the door is not closed.”

Smadbeck doubled down, calling it distasteful for commissioners to get paid.

“This is a housing bank not a job bank, we don’t need to be creating jobs,” Smadbeck said.

Several elected officials in Edgartown receive a yearly stipend, according to the town’s 2021 annual town meeting warrant. The three select board members receive a combined \$13,500, the three board of assessors receive a combined \$3,300, and the town moderator receives \$300.

Members of the public and steering committee members voiced support for housing bank commissioners to receive stipends.

Kimberly Angell, a single parent and member of the steering committee, clarified that the stipend is not a job, but pocket change to help with childcare, bus fare, or other small expenses.

Kat Monterosso, a member of the Edgartown energy committee and master plan committee, encouraged a stipend.

“We have an issue on this Island when it comes to representation. The people that need to be represented when it comes to affordable housing do not have the luxury and the time because we’re working,” Monterosso said. “We need to remove any minor barrier. If that’s \$50 for a babysitter so that somebody who actually lives this way can have their voice heard we need to do that no questions asked.”

Keith Chatinover, a county commissioner, said better representation on boards comes when members are paid a stipend.

“With all due respect...you all do get paid to do this job,” Chatinover said to the board.

Lorna Andrade said the article shouldn’t be hung up on the option of a stipend.

“We are all getting older, we are not going to be here, they will be here, so please let’s not hang this up over nonsense,” she said.

The board also wanted other items clarified.

After getting feedback from each Island town, a ballot vote was added after legislative approval,

Smadbeck said he wanted to see a nonbinding ballot vote for the upcoming annual town election to give as many town residents a say as possible. Abrams agreed.

Towns that do not opt-in to the housing bank will not be included in it. The steering committee’s goal, however, is to get support from all six Island towns.

Silber said there was “clear consensus” from the Island towns that a withdrawal provision be added so the steering committee added a provision allowing towns to opt out after 10 years if they wanted. Smadbeck said restricting towns to 10 years was “onerous.”

“I’m opposed to that. I think the town’s should be able to opt out,” he said.

Select board chair Michael Donaroma concurred, saying the perception of being locked in for 10 years doesn’t sit well.

Abrams said 10-year clause was not essential.

All projects will need approval by the town advisory board except for a loan or grant to individual, single family home, a new ADU, a restriction purchase, shared appreciation loan, or other situation where housing bank loan is restricted to a single residence.

Smadbeck disagreed and said the advisory board should look at single family units.

Abrams said they would talk with other towns to see how they feel about town advisory board involvement.

“We are not asking you to support every part of this. We are only asking you to allow voters to vote on it. That’s it,” Abrams said.

Board members said they were not ready to put the article on the warrant and aimed to meet again next week.

“Hopefully you can work it out with Ron and we’ll have something we can get ready to put on the warrant next week,” Smadbeck said.

“Maybe,” select board member Margaret Serpa added.

“It’s going to fly, everybody wants it, it’s just a matter of getting it right. You guys are going to be handling millions of dollars and people are going to want to know every little detail,” Donaroma said.

This is the Island’s third attempt at a housing bank. This proposal seeks a 2 percent real estate transfer fee through a mechanism similar to the Martha’s Vineyard Land Bank. However, unlike the Land Bank, the first \$1 million of a sale price isn’t subject to the 2 percent fee. As currently drafted, the housing bank would consist of seven elected commissioners, each representing one of the Vineyard’s six towns, plus one commissioner at large. The legislation also calls for a town advisory board for each town.

The board’s next meeting is on Jan. 3, brushing right up against the town’s deadline for filing warrant articles which is Jan. 4.