



The housing bank article will appear on the West Tisbury annual town meeting warrant.

Housing Bank Article Approved for West Tisbury Warrant

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Following on the heels of Edgartown’s 2-1 vote Monday, the two-member West Tisbury select board agreed Wednesday to place the revised Islandwide housing bank article on this year’s annual town meeting warrant.

Numerous changes to the article have been made over the past few weeks with extensive input from Island towns, John Abrams of the Coalition to Create the MV Housing Bank told the board.

“We feel like we have an article that is certainly not diminished; it feels like it’s improved,” Mr. Abrams said.

The article's language has been altered so much, Mr. Abrams said, that the coalition will be taking it back to Aquinnah, Tisbury and Chilmark — which have already committed to bringing the housing bank before voters — so their select boards can approve the updated version.

Among the latest revisions, the draft dated Jan. 4 strengthens town advisory boards' oversight of housing bank activities, stiffens environmental requirements and places limitations on debt service, Mr. Abrams said.

"We do feel that there may not need to be much borrowing," he added.

Select board chairman Skipper Manter applauded the changes, but questioned what would happen in the case of potential amendments to the article on the town meeting floor.

"We're assuming that amendments may come up," Mr. Abrams said, noting that the article needs to have consistent language for all the towns in order for the housing bank legislation to proceed in Boston.

"We've got six towns and what we need to send to the legislature is one thing," he said.

"So we're going to be very aware of how those amendments affect [it] and we will speak to that if amendments come up at town meeting that are going to take it out of the realm of [consensus]," Mr. Abrams said.

Mr. Manter also called for a five-year "cooling-off period" before members of the housing bank steering committee could be employed by the housing bank, and expressed displeasure that residents of a town that votes against the article might be able to benefit from the housing bank nonetheless.

"It rubs me the wrong way," he said. "If you're going to play the game, you have to be on the team."

Mr. Abrams asked for Mr. Manter's help in convincing all six Island towns to vote in favor of the legislation.

"We all know that people live where they can. We shouldn't be penalizing individuals," he said.

"They're also all voters," Mr. Manter replied.

After more than 35 minutes of discussion, both select board members approved the article for the town meeting warrant.

"We've come a long way," Mr. Manter said.

"I want to . . . commend you all on a great process," member Cynthia Mitchell told the coalition.

The Oak Bluffs select board will decide next week whether to put the article on the spring town warrant.

In other business Wednesday, Jeffrey DuBard gave a presentation on Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE), a program supported by the state and federal governments that provides up-front funding for property owners to make their homes more energy efficient.

The funding then becomes a lien on the property and is repaid to the state through the town's tax collection process, Mr. DuBard said.

Town treasurer Kathie Logue voiced concern, saying West Tisbury does not have systems in place for this type of collection.

"We have not ever done betterments," Ms. Logue said, referring to a process by which towns recoup from taxpayers the up-front expenses of certain municipal improvements.

"This is a weird kind of a hybrid," she cautioned. "We could be taking on a pretty large liability."

Ms. Mitchell advised checking with other Massachusetts towns that have used the PACE program, and then speaking with the West Tisbury financial team before making any decisions.

"I think it does bear some due diligence," she said.

Also Wednesday, the board appointed Erik Peckar to represent the town on the Cape Light Compact governing board, replacing Sue Hruby.

Mr. Manter agreed to serve on an interim basis as the town's member of the Duke County Health Council, saying he could commit only to virtual meetings due to his job responsibilities at the police department.

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