

Edgartown puts housing bank article on warrant

Serpa pushes back in dissenting vote.

By **Brian Dowd** - January 5, 2022



Margaret Serpa, shown here at a prepandemic meeting, voted against placing the housing bank article on the town warrant — Brian Dowd

Edgartown voters will make their decision on the housing bank this spring following a 2-1 vote by the Edgartown select board to place the housing bank article on the annual town meeting warrant.

The vote to place the article on the warrant comes after several meetings where the select board and the town's legal counsel, Ron Rappaport, gave feedback, and at times criticism, on the article.

Select board member Arthur Smadbeck thanked the steering committee members on the call. "I think you guys have done a great job of sort of taking what all the towns have said and putting this together," he said. "I think it's going to be worthwhile to get this out in front of town voters at town meeting."

Smadbeck then made a motion to have the housing bank article placed on the town warrant. After a moment of silence, select board chair Michael Donaroma seconded the motion. Donaroma said he agreed with Smadbeck that it was time for voters to get involved: "We've come a long way. I still have some concerns. I think the review committee is really an important item, to

keep a balance on everything. I'm not crazy about the setup on that. The bonding is a little complicated, but again, everybody's been working hard on this."

Select board member Margaret Serpa, who cast the dissenting vote, said she believed the housing bank would make "a huge hit on Edgartown," and the town should focus on current affordable housing projects it has in the works: "I think that we need to concentrate right now on what we're doing for Edgartown. We need to work through the Meshacket project. We need to do more of the individual tax lots that we've done, and we need to do more with Edgartown money, which is going to be a huge chunk of what they're asking, which bothers me."

If approved, the housing bank would not impact funds going to the town's affordable housing projects like Meshacket. As currently drafted, the housing bank proposal seeks a completely new revenue stream through a 2 percent real estate transfer fee, similar to the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank. However, unlike the Land Bank, the first \$1 million of a sale price wouldn't be subject to the 2 percent fee. 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. This is the Island's third attempt at a housing bank.

"Regarding Margaret's vote, I do feel I need to clarify that the housing bank and the transfer fee in no way diverts any funding at all from any of the worthy projects that Edgartown currently has underway," steering committee co-chair Julie Fay told The Times in an email after the meeting. "It creates an additional significant revenue stream that will enable additional housing efforts in Edgartown, and provide new funding opportunities for all the towns. We really appreciate the town boards partnering with us in this transparent dialogue, and their willingness to think through solutions to a very complex problem."

In an email statement to The Times, Jason Mazar-Kelly, a member of the Edgartown affordable housing committee, thanked the board for reviewing the housing bank proposal, and asked the board to bring the article onto the warrant.

"We have lost numerous friends and support systems due to the housing shortage. Wonderful people who made huge contributions to the Island but who were not properly valued in relation to the cost of living in the communities where they worked and therefore could not afford to stay. Time is not on our side, and my personal belief is that we need as much help as we can from all different types of organizations, bodies, and functions to properly address the housing crisis," Mazar-Kelly's statement said in part.

Serpa also criticized the 2 percent fee being proposed, and said Nantucket's proposed transfer fee is 0.5 percent.

Nantucket's fee is lower because their revenue from home sales is nearly double the Vineyard's. According to the Nantucket Inquirer and Mirror, Nantucket's real estate market topped \$2 billion in sales in 2021. The average home price, at the end of November 2021, was \$3.3 million, and the median home price was \$2.6 million.

"Nantucket's 0.5, half-percent, will bring in approximately \$5 million a year because their annual housing sales are double ours, and their median home price is approaching \$3 million. Their volume of sales is approximately double what ours is," coalition coordinator Laura Silber told The Times in a phone call. Additionally, Silber said Nantucket is using one third of their new short-term rental revenue — which Martha's Vineyard is not doing.

Following the vote, several members of the public had their hands raised on the Zoom meeting, but the board did not take public comment.

In other business, Ted Rosbeck, the select board's representative to the Martha's Vineyard Commission, is not seeking reappointment to the regional planning agency. The board appointed Rosbeck last year in a surprise move over longtime representative James Joyce, owner of Carroll & Vincent Real Estate. Rosbeck owns Island Pools and Spas, and is a founding member of the Martha's Vineyard Builders Association.

Speaking to The Times by phone, Rosbeck said he values the commission as a regional entity for the Island, but personal reasons brought him to decide not to seek reappointment.

"Over the year, even though it was short, in my opinion the current environment is not conducive to having conversations that will be productive, and likely more futile," Rosbeck said, adding there was no animosity toward the commission. "How the guidelines and policies that the commission has adopted and changed over the years. I think there's discussion that needs to be had as to what level we have these guidelines and policies, and how far they go."

Rosbeck said he plans to send out a statement in more detail about not seeking reappointment to the select board.