

## West Tisbury accepts housing bank warrant article

*PACE is considered; new appointments made.*

By **Eunki Seonwoo** - January 6, 2022



*John Abrams, member of the Coalition to Create the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank, presented the amended warrant draft for the housing bank. West Tisbury is now the fifth town to accept the warrant article for its spring town meeting.*

West Tisbury became the fifth of six Island towns to put a housing bank article on this spring's annual town meeting.

During a Zoom meeting Wednesday, the select board unanimously approved putting the Coalition to Create the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank's article on the warrant. Oak Bluffs, which meets Tuesday, is now the only town that has not yet approved putting the article before voters.

The coalition made revisions to the housing bank article since they last saw the board in December.

"We've been on a bit of an adventure. Three meetings with the Edgartown select board, one with Tisbury and one with Oak Bluffs, and have gotten tremendous feedback to weave all of that together into consideration concerns you've expressed before," coalition member John Abrams said. "We feel like we have an article that is certainly not diminished. It feels like it's improved."

Abrams went through the amendments and answered questions from the board. The changes Abrams listed included a \$2,000 stipend for housing bank commissioners, the towns' ability to leave the housing bank at any time, a ballot vote needed after the housing bank legislation enactment to adopt it, and efforts to be environmentally friendly, among several others.

West Tisbury select board chair Skipper Manter expressed some concerns about the draft, such as the “checks and balances” for the housing bank, funding sources, and how the housing bank will be staffed, among other topics. In particular, he was concerned how clauses in the draft article were worded for “this once in a lifetime opportunity.”

“I’m a stickler for details. I’ve spent way too many years reading laws and court decisions,” Manter said. “I nitpick ... and we only have one chance to get this right ... wording is everything. We’ve come too far to have to go back.”

Abrams said the wording will be looked over.

The board members said they thought the coalition made “reasonable compromises” in developing the amended warrant article draft.

“I’m pleased with what you’ve done. Very pleased,” West Tisbury select board member Cynthia Mitchell said.

In other business, Jeffrey Dubard presented the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Massachusetts program, run by the state’s Development Finance Agency, with a recommendation that West Tisbury adopt the program to support West Tisbury’s goal of being powered by 100% renewable energy by 2040. Dubard said PACE covers efforts to become more environmentally friendly, but the funds will need to be paid back on the property tax bill. Dubard said PACE would bring benefits to various levels of West Tisbury, from individual property owners to the municipal level. Fifty other Massachusetts municipalities are currently participating in PACE, including Boston, New Bedford, and Amherst.

After listening to the presentation, West Tisbury town administrator Jeniffer Rand said the language makes the program a betterment system, a type of loan. West Tisbury treasurer Kathy Logue said PACE seems like a “weird hybrid” to her that could place financial liabilities on the town. Additionally, Logue said the current software cannot process betterment systems and this could be expensive when the town implements a new software system.

“Carbon emission and energy consumption are much more a result of commercial farm properties than residential properties,” Dubard said. “We have set an expectation to be energy neutral by 2040, and if we’re not taking measures that might not be altogether convenient, but require a little administrative reorganization in order to achieve that, then as far as I’m concerned ... shame on us. We should be giving the opportunity for our community members to do their part without it being challenging.”

The board members said the consideration for PACE is not time-sensitive and will be revisited in the future. The board members asked Logue to look into PACE in more detail.

The board unanimously approved the septic loan program policy as amended and presented by Logue.

The board also unanimously appointed Erik Peckar as the West Tisbury representative at Cape Light Compact. He is filling in for Sue Hruby, the former representative who is stepping down, and will serve until April.

The board unanimously approved Manter to join the Dukes County Health Council as the West Tisbury representative. Manter said he is willing to stay in the position until the next election in April since he can participate through Zoom. Manter said in-person meetings would make serving in the council while doing his job as the West Tisbury Police lieutenant difficult.

The West Tisbury complete streets committee sent a letter to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation in October and received a response Dec. 22. The department's district five office wrote that they will evaluate various items that relate to the committee's concerns about pedestrian and bicycle traffic in West Tisbury, including speed limits, signage, and road surfaces.

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