

## Housing bank wins; O.B. select board drama

By **The Martha's Vineyard Times** - April 14, 2022

1 of 10 < >



*You can see the feet of voters in the booths at Edgartown Town Hall.*

After its clean sweep of town meetings two days ago, the housing bank has three more victories under its belt. In Edgartown, the housing bank received 473 yes votes and 193 no votes. It also won in Oak Bluffs in a vote of 775-285 and West Tisbury 683-194.

The housing bank must be approved both at town meeting and on the town ballot. In order to move on to the state legislature, it must have the support of four of the six Island towns. After tonight it appears well on its way.

“The margins are reflective of what we saw at town meetings, which is great,” Laura Silber, campaign coordinator for the Coalition to Create the Martha’s Vineyard Housing Bank, told The Times. “It’s a momentous night for Martha’s Vineyard. For three different towns to vote on that issue is definitive. Those are numbers we can take to the Legislature and say, ‘Look, this is not a small margin. This is a landslide and you can give us the right to do this.’”

The Legislature is considering a bill that would allow towns to charge a 2 percent fee on the purchase of properties to fund the housing bank. On the Island, the first \$1 million would be exempt from the fee. So the buyer of a home for \$1.2 million would pay a 2 percent fee on the \$200,000.

“On behalf of the coalition I wanted to say a huge thank you to everyone who has worked on this effort and town boards who worked and engaged with us,” Silber said. “It’s not over. We look forward to votes in Chilmark, Aquinnah, and the ballot vote in Tisbury.”

This housing bank is more than a year in the making and started with a steering committee. The coalition held public forums, met with select boards, and tweaked the proposal along the way.

“This is what community organizing is all about,” Silber said. “It’s literally engaging the community and making sure the community is part of the process. Making sure every age group is engaged. People don’t participate if they don’t feel like their voices are heard.”

There was drama in the Oak Bluffs select board race where incumbent Gail Barmakian (505) appears to have defeated Dion Alley (503) by just two votes. Town Clerk Colleen Morris and her staff had to take a close look at ballots to see if any of the three write-ins in the race changed the outcome. After a review, Morris emerged from the polls to where Alley, Barmakian, and their supporters were waiting and announced the write-ins didn’t alter the select board race, that Barmakian’s two vote win appeared solid. A third candidate for select board, Jim Bishop received 49 votes.

Alley told The Times at the polls that he will be requesting a recount and said it was a good sign so many voters exercised their votes. “That’s the way the town used to be.”

After the votes were counted, Barmakian called it “a cliffhanger.” Asked if she was surprised at how close it was, she said, “absolutely positively.” Despite his desire for a recount, Alley

warmly congratulated Barmakian after Morris announced the write-ins didn’t alter the count.

A short time later, Tommye Ann Brown, who Barmakian called her “unofficial campaign manager,” and who describes herself as Barmakian’s “biggest cheerleader,” told The Times what she told her daughter about voting.

Brown said her daughter, Ana Irwin, was the last person to enter the polls at approximately 6:59 pm. Brown said she told Irwin, “Don’t ever think your vote doesn’t count.”

Two days before the election, Bishop took to his controversial Facebook page to ask his supporters to support Alley. Though he said he was withdrawing from the race, it was too late for his name to be taken off the ballot. Bishop caused a stir with his penchant for posting memes on

his Facebook page that took aim at transgender individuals playing sports and made light of owning multiple guns, among other things.

In the other contested race in Oak Bluffs, incumbent Mark Crossland defeated challenger Scott Slarksy, 649-225. There were a whopping 216 voters who left the race blank.

Question 1 in Oak Bluffs, which is a Proposition 2½ debt exclusion to pay for a new boiler at Oak Bluffs School, passed by a vote of 795-102. And a third non-binding question asking Holtec, the owner of Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station not to dump radioactive water into Cape Cod Bay, received overwhelming support in a vote of 999-45.

In the West Tisbury select board race, there was no drama. Jessica Miller was the winner of the three-way race for a one-year term on the select board with 601 votes. Chris Lyons received 198 votes and James Kligensmith tallied 55 votes.

“I’m really happy and excited to serve my town and really grateful to all of the people who came to the polls and to the people who were out here all day holding up my signs, like my husband and my daughter,” Jessica Miller

West Tisbury also approved the non-binding referendum asking Holtec to withdraw plans to dump radioactive water into Cape Cod Bay, 816-29; and approved spending \$423,000 for the Howes House renovation and reconstruction project, 659-190.

## Other results

In **Edgartown**, 15.8% of the town’s 4,258 registered voters cast ballots. There were no contested races in the town election. Select board chair Michael Donaroma was reelected with 461 votes; Donna Goodale received 552 for board of assessors; Candace Nichols tallied 530 votes for board of health; William Bishop IV got 569 for constable; Julia Tarka (479) and Steven Jordan (465) were elected to the finance committee; Maggie Morrisson (515) and Olga Church (499) are on the library trustees; Steven Ewing received 582 votes for Land Bank; Glenn Searle got 562 for park commissioner; Lucy Morrison received 551 votes for planning board; and Laura Seguin got 511 votes for school committee; Searle also was elected a wastewater commissioner with 549 votes; and Scott Ellis got 574 votes for water commissioner.

In **West Tisbury**, 32.4% of the town’s 2,750 registered voters cast ballots. Other than the one-year select board position, there were no other contested races in the town election. Town moderator Dan Waters was reelected with 808 votes; Cynthia Mitchell was reelected to the select board with 744 votes; Jessica Milller won her reelection to the board of health with 768; Tara J. Whiting-Wells was reelected as town clerk with 798 votes; Jeremiah Brown won 753 votes to return to be the town’s tree warden; Mark Hap Bernard returns to the parks and recreation committee with 711 votes; Matt Merry (704) and Amy Upton (683) return to the planning board with the new addition of Heikki Soikkili (637); Frances Finnigan (696), Micah Solomon Thanhauser (657), and Emily Fern Fischer (752) are on the library trustees; Clark Rattet joins the finance committee with 674 votes.

In **Oak Bluffs**, 20% of the town's 4,191 registered voters cast ballots. Other than the select board and planning board positions, Kristien Beaumont Reimann was elected to the Land Bank with 784 votes; James Butterick was reelected to the board of health with 774 votes; Richard Combra Jr. got 759 votes for parks commission; Rizwan Malik received 672 votes for school committee; William Alwardt got 741 votes and Michael deBettencourt got 843 for two positions on the water commission; and Duncan Ross received 779 for water commission moderator. Several offices — two on the finance committee, constable, and cemetery commissioner — will be determined by write-ins. Morris expects to announce the winners in those races Friday afternoon.

*Reporters Rich Saltzberg, Eunki Seonwoo, and Abigail Rosen contributed to this story.*