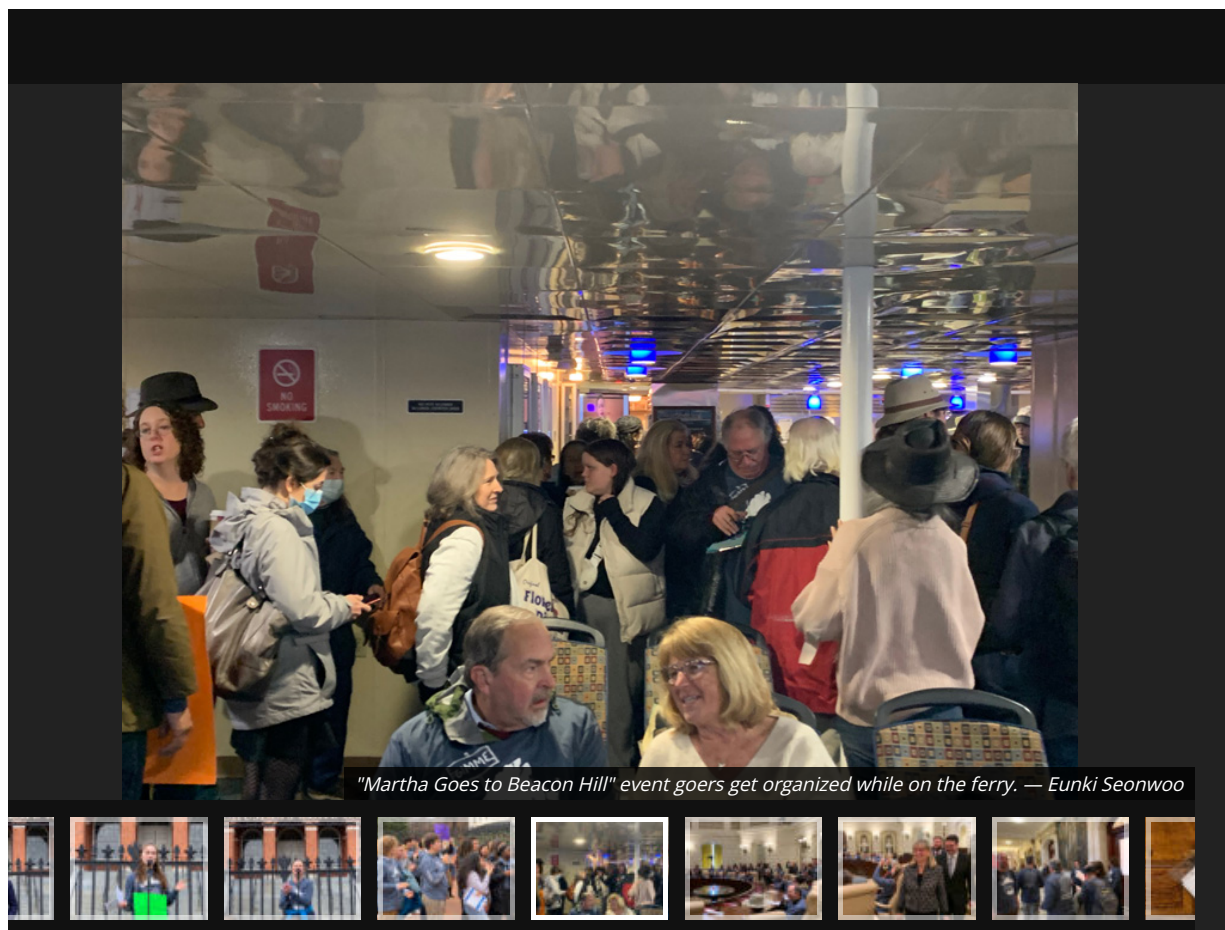


# Vineyarders rally for housing at the State House

Over 200 Vineyarders take a stand to preserve the Island's affordable housing and the co

By Eunki Seonwoo - March 24, 2023



"Martha Goes to Beacon Hill" event goers get organized while on the ferry. — Eunki Seonwoo

Islanders rang out a message to state legislators on Thursday: legislation to create the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank must advance to secure the community's future.

Activists from both Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket joined together for the "Martha Goes to Beacon F event, organized by the Coalition to Create the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank, to push for legislation that would create the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank, an effort that **received overwhelming support** for the Island's voters.

The day started with the 7 am ferry out of Woods Hole and culminated with a rally at the State House st in Boston, with speeches, chants and drumming. Around 250 Vineyarders and roughly 60 Nantucketers young and old, stood together.

The Vineyard housing bank – if passed by state lawmakers by a 2 percent transfer fee on the purchase of properties or from the fee. So the buyer of a home for \$1.2 million would

Thursday's large turnout provided hope for some in attendance.

Coalition member John Abrams said when he first came to only one bus transporting people. On Thursday, four chartered buses from Boston.

"Now, this renewed effort has got far better legs under it, a much better political situation," he said. "It's going to succeed this time. We are just psyched. I've been working on affordable housing for 40 years and as much as we've done, it's only gotten worse. In my view, this is the ultimate solution. It's the nature of the long-term funding year after year ... that will make all the difference."

Abrams added he is excited about a provision in the legislation in which at least 75 percent of the money would go to previously developed properties.

"I see it as a mechanism to buy houses, restrict them to year-round, and get them out of the short-term rental market, and thereby solve two problems at once," he said.

The housing crisis on Martha's Vineyard has forced many to do the "Island shuffle" and look for several Others decided to leave the Island. And a common motivation for Vineyarders attending the rally Thursday was housing insecurity.

Bob Laskowski, a retired physician from Oak Bluffs, said he personally knows healthcare workers who leave for a bus ride to Boston, he told The Times that housing insecurity is a health risk.

"There is research that shows children who are housing insecure perform less well in school," he said. "It affects health. We know people who have healthcare problems, if they're facing housing insecurity, that takes priority conditions — diabetes, heart problems, et cetera — they take a second seat."

Martha's Vineyard Hospital director of public relations and special projects, George Brennan, also said he would not be able to recruit and retain staff at the hospital — doctors, nurses, support staff — that's very difficult with

Brennan was the news editor at The Times before joining the hospital. He said housing affected staff at the

"We lost quite a few employees through the years because they couldn't afford to live on the Island, and it takes a lot of time and energy training staff, working with them, and then you lose them because of housing. Not to mention the affordability of the Island. So, this is a really important issue and hopefully we can get that across to

Ralliers were encouraged by the diversity of Thursday's turnout.

Martha's Vineyard Commission Island housing planner Laura Silber called it an "incredible display."

"Democracy is not a spectator sport, and this is a really important example of what can happen when or come to the State House to make their voices heard," Silber said. "This is significant."

Some who came out were advocating for their own situations.

"I moved onto the Island in July with my boyfriend and we were able to find housing in the winter," Isla Boston. "We kind of can't for the summer, so we're sort of in a position where we'll sleep in our cars or we want to do that because we really love our jobs here."

Racaniello works as an administrative assistant at Sullivan and Associates and her boyfriend is a plumber, but the income for it is very low, especially for where we're living," she said. "The amount of money on the Island with that. So, it's a little contradicting there. It's a little frustrating."

Island artist Bernica Wilcox, who also does marketing and social media work, moved to the Island three years ago. Her boyfriend was from the Island, so they were able to live with his uncle in a studio apartment that is "literally

"There's no opportunities to move into a bigger space on the Island that's also affordable, where you can't spend money on yourself as well," she said in Boston. "There's literally no place to live on-Island that also provides

Both women said they wanted to stay on Martha's Vineyard for the opportunity it provides to artists, the beauty. However, that may not be a reality.

Rudy Sanfilippo, who owns a home on the Island and works at South Mountain Company, told The Times that more apartments was needed because the Island simply does not have the room to give everyone single-family housing. "It's just one of many other issues that need to be addressed, such as changing zoning bylaws," he said. "I called for a balance between affordable housing and conservation."

"I think this opens the door for more things down the road that could really benefit the local community," he said.

Sanfilippo also said the legislation will be a tool to manage the housing issue. "The housing crisis will need to be solved on the Islands," he said. "This isn't a problem we're trying to solve, this is a problem we're trying to make less of. It's a sudden create a bunch of housing for the people that need it. I think this is going to be a step in the right direction for the region, the rest of the state, the rest of the country as to what can be done in communities like ours versus year-round people and a small sect of year-round people who just can't afford to live anywhere."

Arriving at the Massachusetts State House, Island activists were given time to meet with lawmakers at the State House.

took place. That included State Senate President Karen Spilka, D-Ashland and Cape and Islands State Se

“Housing is an area that is particularly important,” Spilka said, addressing how many families cannot aff  
problem for Massachusetts. It’s a problem, unfortunately, for the entire country. But it’s something that v  
address.”

At the state capital, Islanders split into two groups to maximize their time. Some went to engage passersl  
legislative offices to advocate for the housing bank legislation.

But the highlight of the day was the rally at the front steps of the State House, which featured several gue

Coalition co-chair Arielle Faria emceed the event. Drums rapidly beat, activists cheered, and passing dri  
activists waved signs in the air reading various housing-related messages like “No Housing = No Teache

Cyr said housing has been an ongoing issue for the Cape and Islands for years now, exacerbated by the p  
steroids.” He said the housing crisis affects everyone, from young Islanders struggling to find a home or

He said the community is “truly at a crossroads” and encouraged continued activism.

“I want the same level of energy and activism demanding that we change our zoning laws, that we reject  
our future,” he said. “We can preserve our environment and cherish our historic preservation while buil

State Rep. Dylan Fernandes, D-Falmouth, emphasized the desperation felt by many that stems from the  
experienced. He underscored the damage the “ultra wealthy” have caused to the housing supply on the C  
second or third homes, and companies acquiring properties for short-term rentals.

“We see hope ahead with a housing bank,” he said.

Martha’s Vineyard representatives stepped up to the mic as well.

Martha’s Vineyard Community Services CEO Elizabeth Folcarelli underscored that affordable housing i  
County Sheriff Bob Ogden said a lack of housing can negatively impact public safety. Aquinnah select b  
housing has forced Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) members off their ancestral homelands.

Nantucket Chamber of Commerce executive director Peter Burke took to the mic, emphasizing how eac  
municipal housing director Tucker Holland revealed the severity of his Island’s housing situation. Accor  
listings on the Island, and the average listing price is \$6.2 million.

Many of the participants of the day were students from the Island’s schools, and it wasn’t just a day off fr  
Charter School students told The Times they joined the trek to support their community.

“I want to help,” Ethan Knight said. “I have some friends who are having trouble finding housing, and I

March Anderson-Brookes said her mother is “really involved” in the housing bank efforts and her father is a big part of my life,” March said.

Jasper Grow was glad to see students from schools outside of the charter school also joining the event.

At Boston, students were some of the most energetic among the advocates. Martha’s Vineyard Public Schools are proud in seeing students participate.

“When you see our students grow and they get their voice — we heard their voice — I feel, job well done well done to students,” he said.

One student who made her voice heard during the rally was Grayson Kirk, a senior at Martha’s Vineyard High School. She highlighted the fact that the community is denied the housing it needs, while mansions go up that workers who keep the Island running are being pushed out.

“This is not to say that this is all that we are here for,” she said. “We are not just servants of the wealthy. We are beautiful. Get rid of the community and you don’t have [the] Islands. This is our home and we deserve to be here.”

After the rally, participants got back on the charter buses and returned home.

