

Subdivision planned for Kennedy land

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By Nelson Sigelman

Agents for Caroline Kennedy last week filed a subdivision plan for the Kennedy family property in Aquinnah, proposing to divide a total of 366 acres now in the form of 31 separate parcels of land into seven large lots.

The plan was presented to members of the Aquinnah planning board last Thursday night as part of an estate planning effort by Ms. Kennedy, daughter of the late Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and the late president John F. Kennedy. The plan, according to Ms. Kennedy's representatives, was designed to preserve the character of the secluded and beautiful Kennedy estate set among the woodlands, dunes, and coastal moors of Aquinnah and bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and Squibnocket Pond.

Under local and state zoning requirements, the subdivision plan does not require planning board approval because each building lot created has frontage on an approved road.

However, the plan does require review by the Martha's Vineyard Commission as a development of regional impact (DRI) because of its size. MVC review is required for any development that proposes to divide a contiguous or related ownership of land of 30 acres or more, except when divided into less than six parcels that are irrevocably prohibited from further division.

Planning board members, who signed off on the plan the same night it was submitted, were unreserved in their praise. "It's ideal," said Camille Rose, planning board chairman and Aquinnah selectman. "It is just perfectly done." She added that, left up to her, it would not be sent to the MVC. "I don't think it is necessary in a situation like this."

"I think it is really great," said Peter Temple, planning board member. Mr. Temple said it is reassuring to know that the land, which is susceptible to greater density, will stay within the family and will be less densely developed.

Ms. Kennedy and her brother John F. Kennedy Jr. inherited the property from their mother, who purchased the property in 1978 and was a frequent seasonal Island resident until her death in May 1994.

In the years following Ms. Onassis's death, the Island rumor mill generated news of a potential sale out of the family. In July 1999, John Kennedy, his wife Carolyn Bessette, and her sister Lauren Bessette died when the small plane Mr. Kennedy was piloting crashed into the ocean south of Gay Head, as they were traveling to the Island.

Through it all Ms. Kennedy, her husband Edwin Schlossberg, and the couple's three children, Rose Kennedy Schlossberg, 17, Tatiana Kennedy Schlossberg, 15, and John B. Kennedy Schlossberg, 12, remained unobtrusive Island visitors.

The subdivision plan was prepared by Schofield, Barbini and Hoehn of Vineyard Haven for the property owners listed as Ms. Kennedy, and Ms. Kennedy and her husband as guardians of their three children.

Richard Renehan, a partner in the Boston law firm of Goulston and Storrs who has represented several Island towns in a number of important real estate and zoning cases, represents Ms. Kennedy.

In a telephone conversation Tuesday, Mr. Renehan said that the subdivision plan converts a checkerboard of 31 lots into seven lots totaling 366 acres. The family's two goals, he said, were to create an estate plan and preserve the character of the land.

Mr. Renehan said lot two (106 acres) is the existing homestead and as a practical matter would remain the way it is. Lots three (32 acres), four (32 acres) and five (41 acres) are for the three children. Any future subdivision of those lots would require MVC approval, said Mr. Renehan. "So you are not going to see physically any changes there for the foreseeable future," he said.

Mr. Renehan said the Kennedys have no immediate use for lot one (39 acres), and lot six (53 acres), which could "in theory" be sold in the future. He said the two "non-Kennedy" lots would carry a deed restriction against further subdivision.

Lot seven, comprised of 62 acres, has been declared as non-buildable, according to Mr. Renehan, a stipulation that

will be listed on the plan. That lot will provide access for the other lots to the beach. "We have locked ourselves into an unbuildable lot," said Mr. Renehan.

The plan also shows several small lots outside the subdivision that are also owned by Ms. Kennedy. Mr. Renehan said those lots were left out of the plan for a variety of reasons that included title, access, and topography issues. He said the subdivision included all of the lots that were problem-free. "Nobody is planning to do anything, and nobody may be able to do anything with them, until you do some cleaning up of titles," he said.

Mr. Renehan said he is now preparing for MVC review. He said that under existing MVC regulations the family is probably exempt from the need to make any contribution to affordable housing. "The Kennedys will in fact make such a contribution," he said.

Mr. Renehan said the plan is quite straightforward. Invoking the name of a significant land use battle in Edgartown that spanned a decade when a developer proposed to create a beach club and houses on a farm bordering South Beach, Mr. Renehan said, "This is not Herring Creek. There is no builder in the background."

Prior to being presented to the planning board, the plan was shown to members of conservation organizations, including Sheriff's Meadow Foundation and the Vineyard Conservation Society. "The conservation people love it," Mr. Renehan said.

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