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MVC reviews Kennedy subdivision plan

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Agents for Caroline Kennedy held an informal discussion with the land use planning committee (LUPC) of the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC) Monday, in preparation for a public hearing on Feb. 2 regarding a subdivision plan for the Kennedy family property in Aquinnah.

The MVC is reviewing the plan as a development of regional impact (DRI) because of its size. Although the subdivision plan does not require planning board approval, Aquinnah's planning board already has indicated its support.

The property is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, Squibnocket Pond, State Road, and Moshup Trail. The subdivision plan converts 31 lots into seven lots totaling 366 acres.

Attorney Richard Renehan explained that Caroline Kennedy and her husband Edwin Schlossberg want to divide the land equally among their three children and to preserve the character of the property.

At Monday's meeting, the commissioners reviewed questions raised at a meeting in December regarding specific Aquinnah zoning and subdivision regulations, details on wetlands on the property, possible building envelopes, and clarification of water issues.

Mr. Renehan clashed with Chris Murphy, Chilmark's MVC commissioner, who insisted that the plan should formally include a map of the lots' building envelopes.

Arguing that the proposed subdivision is an estate plan, not a development plan, Mr. Renehan asked, "Why freeze us in any way?"

Mr. Murphy told the commissioners, "Dick's trying to make sure we don't step on the owner's toes." Turning to Mr. Renehan, he added, "Our job is to help you do the planning. When we're done, I hope you have the plan for the future."

Mr. Renehan countered, "The owner would say, what's not to like? Why do you have to go beyond that? The owner would say, this is an estate plan. Why not just approve the basic subdivision plan? How can you possibly have a problem with seven lots this size?"

Another commissioner, John Best of Tisbury, wanted to know if there were any safeguards to protect future development for 50 years or more. Camille Rose, chairman of the Aquinnah planning board and an Aquinnah selectman, and Sarah Thulin of the town conservation commission assured him they thought the town's already stringent regulations would be adequate.

In addition to a habitat assessment from Doug Cooper of Cooper Environmental Services, Mr. Renehan provided copies of a letter he received from the Vineyard Conservation Society, affirming the Kennedy estate plan as "...a commitment to environmental protection on Martha's Vineyard...."

Under existing MVC regulations, the Kennedy-Schlossberg family is not required to make a contribution to affordable housing. However, Mr. Renehan said, "Someone spread the rumor in Aquinnah that we were wearing our Santa Claus suits."

While the family is not prepared to donate land, Mr. Renehan said, they agreed to double their offer to a donation of \$100,000, but want it earmarked toward a specific affordable housing project.

The family also agreed to make a contribution to the Massachusetts Estuaries Project for a study of nitrogen loading in Squibnocket Pond, and to install denitrification systems in any new buildings.

No need to wait for Thursday

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