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Martha's Vineyard Commission
Box 1447
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Re: DRI # 602 Vineyard Haven Yacht Club ("VHYC")

From: The Busselle family
30 Owen Little Way
Vineyard Haven, MA.

To the Members of the Martha's Vineyard Commission:

First, a little history: My family has owned the parcel of land at 30 Owen Little Way since my uncle, Bayes Norton, settled my grandmother in one of the first modular homes brought to the island -- more than 60 years ago. That house is long gone, as is the abandoned Steamship Authority ticket office that my parents moved on site. The primary structure now standing is one that I designed while getting my architecture degree, in the 1960s, and was built with the help of family and friends. Over the decades we have worked hard to upgrade this summer cottage, which we love dearly. During these years we have felt the importance of being good neighbors to the five other houses on our street, and good neighbors to the Yacht Club, knowing that the success of a community depends on mutual consideration and tolerance.

The Yacht Club began as a modest beach club for the guests at the Tashmoo Inn on Main Street and local rented houses. The "Casino," as it was called, contained a series of lockers on the first floor, a large assembly hall on the second. A small snack bar was added to the south side. Families enjoyed the beach. (As a teenager I worked as a beach boy, setting up umbrellas, raking the beach and sweeping the dock.) Functions were limited to an enthusiastic group of kids sailing in a class of 8 or 10 wooden 'Dogboats' (again, you could find me in one every summer), which were replaced in the fifties by the Beetle boat. The fleet of Vineyard Haven 15's and 18's was moored in the inner harbor, with sailors reaching their boats by dinghies stored on the beach near the Owen Park. Later, in the 1960s, the Yacht Club leased property at the end of Crocker Avenue for parking to access the dinghies.

A few enthusiasts would gather on the deck of the Casino to watch the races on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The Casino was only used for large groups once a year for the annual meeting at the end of the season. Some staff lived on the second floor, and the assembly hall was used primarily to dry sails. When the Clubhouse was replaced in the sixties, each of the functions began to expand. A single, hard surface tennis court was upgraded to three state-of-the art courts. Activities became more popular. Staff grew in relationship to expansion. To evaluate the current use and environmental impact, we must realize that -- without any changes in the residential character of the surrounding

parcels -- the Yacht Club has grown exponentially. There are now five major functions, each of which attract additional members and increase the use:

1. Beach Club, with a sandy beach, great swimming from a dock and a raft with the addition of swimming classes and lessons
2. Restaurant/snack bar, a very popular destination for members and guests to have lunch.
3. Tennis Club, with three excellent courts, is used continuously from seven in the morning until dark. A tennis shed was recently added to the compound. Last summer there was new attraction - "Carbo-tennis" - which required the broadcasting of loud, hip music onto the courts.
4. Small boat sailing program that has become a major attraction with lessons and instruction for many age groups with several classes of club-owned boats stored on the beach and other parts of the property requiring, also, a number of storage units for sails and equipment. There also has been a shed added for boat repair and storage racks for windsurfing sails.
5. Large boat races that now originate from the Yacht Club since many of the boats are moored directly in front of the property and the dinghies are parked on the beach. Consequently, the parking that was once provided in the inner harbor is now required on site.

Through this growth our family has continued to see the Yacht Club as an asset to our community, one with which we wish to enjoy a neighborly relationship. It is in light of that goal that I bring to your attention my concerns about the current proposed building replacement.

Issues for consideration by the Commission include:

Traffic and parking on Owen Little Way:

The impact at present is considerable. The 25% reduction in the number of on-site parking spaces coupled with a proposed 10 % increase in membership makes it more alarming. The neighborhood knows that parking is a major problem since it is frequently difficult for residents to find parking space on Owen Little Way. The end of the road parking intended for Tisbury public beach use is currently club overflow parking.

Owen Little Way is indeed a "little way." The amount of daily traffic in and out of the Yacht Club severely taxes its capacity. With one lane used for parking, a single lane remains for two-way traffic. Without sidewalks, this single lane is also a pedestrian lane, used by an increasing number of families from the greater neighborhood, and kids who may have arrived by public transportation or live on the street.

Exacerbating a difficult situation, when Main Street was repaved in 2006, it was relined to accommodate a parking lane on the west side, thereby moving the northbound lane of traffic to the extreme right. With limited sight lines from Owen Little Way, this is very dangerous -- for pedestrians, for cars turning right into Owen Little Way, and for cars exiting Owen Little Way with no shoulder to buffer the exit. This hazardous condition warrants mitigation right now, before a serious accident occurs. As project review goes forward, we urge that the Commission undertake an analysis of this situation.

Noise:

Social events – even of the most celebratory nature -- necessarily produce noise and traffic. Social events have become more frequent, either for weddings or club gatherings, extending the use of the property well into the evening. In a populated residential area, the ancillary use of the club at night can strain community relationships, especially when parties or their residue extend beyond town curfew hours. The club should prevent the expansion of events and functions. Large delivery trucks and garbage pickups should be restricted before eight in the morning. Construction should be similarly restricted, and not extend into the evening.

Landscaping and lighting:

Landscaping is very important for a residential zone. At some point, when a large septic system was installed parallel to the courts and the roadway, the club eliminated a split-rail fence and planting along the tennis court parking area. The front end of cars, slightly elevated and sticking out toward the road, is unsightly. We request a more sensitive solution, replacing the bright white shells and replanting bushes or erecting a discrete fence. We support the statement of the applicant that there should be no permanent exterior lighting.

On-site Storage - Off Season Usage

Due to the myriad of activities taking place on site and the requisite need for storage of sails, masts, equipment and paraphernalia, we question whether the site plan adequately represents the actual amount of space required for this purpose.

As with much of the Vineyard, this neighborhood is increasingly occupied during the long “shoulder seasons” of spring and fall. The club stores an ever-increasing number of wrapped boats in the area, giving the unsightly appearance of a boatyard and storage facility.

The residents of Owen Little Way know that the Yacht Club is a vital part of our neighborhood, and we trust that the club sees its neighbors, members and non-members, and their concerns as vital as well. Given mutual good will and accommodation, we should be able to prosper side by side, as we have for so many years.

With thanks for your consideration,

Sam Busselle