

**Tisbury Finance and Advisory Committee
6:30PM, Wednesday, September 17, 2025
Tisbury Senior Center**

1

Present: Chair – Nancy Gilfoy, Alex Meleney, Elaine Miller, Rachel Orr,
Louis Pashman, Allan Rogers,
Others: Recorder Marni Lipke,
Town: Rick Homans,
MVPS: Superintendent Richie Smith, TSC Chair Amy Houghton,
Business Administrator Mark Friedman,
MVRHS: Principal Sean Mulvey, Facility Director Jason O'Donnell
Former Principal/MVPS Curriculum Director Sarah Dingledey,
Coordinator of Pathways & Special Projects Sam Hart,
* TFC members late arrivals, early departures or partial attendance.

Call Meeting to Order

- The Tisbury Finance and Advisory Committee (FinCom or TFC) was called to order at 6:31PM.
(*Recorder's note: Discussions are summarized and grouped for clarity and brevity.*)

**Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) Building Project Update
–Richie Smith – Superintendent, Martha's Vineyard Public Schools (MVPS)**

(See documents on file & Minutes: 1/22/25 p.4-7, 5/14/25 p.2-3, & 6/4/25 p.2-3, & 7/9/25 p.4-5, & 9/3/25 p.4-6.)

Chair Nancy Gilfoy thanked everyone for attending an in-person meeting for this important discussion. The FinCom looked at issues through a financial lens and were especially interested in education which comprised 53% of the Town budget.

- Introductions were made all around and it was found that 4 of the 7 MVPS representatives were Tisbury residents.

- Superintendent Dr. Richie Smith thanked the FinCom for the invitation and offered to take any unanswered questions and/or comments to the MVRHS Building Committee.

- The Project timeline was reviewed from the original failed \$1,600,000 independent feasibility study ask, through the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) 8 phase process.

- After 7 to 9 annual applications the MSBA invited the MVHSD into its program provided the Island agreed to a one time capital assessment formula, which was negotiated and voted by all 6 Island Special or Annual Town Meetings (STM/ATMs) in 2022.

Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
September 17, 2025

2

- In Phases 1 and 2 the Owners Project Manager (OPM) (CHA) and designer/architect (Tappé Architects) were hired. With their help the eligibility application was submitted to and accepted by the MSBA. An Education Plan was drafted and a community survey showed the Island valued Arts, Sports and Vocational educations.
- In Phase 3 Tappé submitted 13 preliminary designs that met MSBA standards; for example in square footage both per student and classroom size. The Building Committee chose a renovation/addition option as the Preferred Schematic where the Performing Arts Center (PAC) became the School center with the expansion mostly in what was now the PAC parking lot as well as a small upgrade around the gym. By August 30th the Preferred Schematic was approved by both the MSBA Subcommittee and full Board.
- Now in Phase 4 Schematic Design – The Construction Manager at Risk (CMR) would be hired (likely in November) and Tappé would create robust plans due in December that would determine total Project cost and MSBA reimbursement rates—announced February 25, 2026 in time for the 2026 STM/ATMs.
- The process was on a tight schedule due to an extra 6 weeks taken to consult Towns and Finance Committees.
- The TFC reviewed the high Tisbury debt level (\$85,000,000) and other urgent Town needs (Town Hall, wastewater, sea level rise, etc.) as well as Town burdens: Steamship Authority docking, Five Corners traffic...

A lengthy and sometimes passionate discussion covered many issues.

- All school projects included some ineligible, non-reimbursable or low reimbursement expenses. For example MSBA gym standard was 2,200 sq. ft.; the MVRHS gym was larger so upgrades were non-reimbursable—although shifting the weight room might be eligible. CHA, Tappé and the Bldg. Committee were doing their best to minimize such expenses: demolition, Furniture/Fixtures/Equipment (FFE), computers, etc. Final ineligible costs could not be predicted until Schematic Design and reimbursement were set.
- The Committee was negotiating other space/cost savings.
- The MSBA turned down a Committee request to reduce minimum classroom size from 850 to 750 sq. ft. (MVRHS current size 670 sq. ft.)
- The design would be based on multi-purpose classrooms, including science rooms—which encompassed higher standards.
- As a comprehensive High School, the expense was driven by vocational departments (now with inadequate room for equipment) and special needs spaces as well as standard academic rooms.
- Square footage was reduced to 199,900 dropping the cost by \$50,000,000.

Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
September 17, 2025

3

- The MSBA had relaxed third party funding restrictions so the Committee and Administration were aggressively pursuing grants including \$5,000,000 from the Executive Office of Education.
- The MVRHS was being built to provide every child regardless of residence an equal and excellent education, however as was previously shown, the Project was being funded by unequal Town assessment. Tisbury was now paying twice as much for the same education for its students.
- A universal rate would tax everyone \$1 per \$1,000 real estate value. The current agreement had some towns paying \$2 while others paid \$0.50.
- Although states differed on regional assessment law, Massachusetts had a general inequality problem such that those with the least often paid the most and those with the most often paid the least.
- MSBA was funded by a percentage of the State sales tax and reimbursement rates were largely determined by property values.
- It was suggested that MSBA reimbursement be distributed according to Town assessment. Tisbury and Oak Bluffs with the lowest property values were responsible for the Island's higher reimbursement rate and should be remunerated accordingly.
- The TFC considered contacting the MSBA directly. Legally speaking, the MSBA was negotiating with the MVRHSD which, as a regional school district, was a single quasi-municipality.
- The 2022 Updated MVRHSD Regional Agreement was minutely drafted with legal counsel, had to pass all 6 Town STM/ATMs and then be examined and approved by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).
- This Project's one-time Capital agreement (30% real estate value/70% enrollment) was embedded in the Update, including setting the enrollment at the 2022 census—in order to avoid unpredictability.
- Any change would require consultation with counsel, the 6 Town STM/ATM votes and DESE approvals, a lengthy process that could not be accommodated within the current Project/MSBA timeline.
- The Updated Agreement required a review every 5 years. Any Town could request an amendment such as a more equal allocation formula. If successful this would make some room in the Tisbury budget for the debt burden, but small tweaks would not be enough.
- An agreement was suggested for Tisbury to pass the Project on condition the Regional Agreement be altered each year to address assessment inequities but it was countered by opinions that once the Project was completed other Towns would have no incentive to act.

Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
September 17, 2025

4

- Several people raised Edgartown's and Chilmark's history of refusing to participate in any such discussions—even to the point of absenting themselves from an All Island School Committee (AISC) Subcommittee exploring regional collaboration advice on simple things like bulk purchasing.
- This resulted in some TFC members advocating repeatedly for “a nuclear option”: that Tisbury force other Towns' hands by defeating the Project, as the only way to achieve some relief.
- The MVRHSC was still debating which Project approval method to use:
 - 6 Town ATM and ballot votes (approval requiring all 12 majority votes) or
 - a single Islandwide majority approval by separate election—all towns would then likely conduct debt exclusion ballot votes.
- The vote choice was State law (MGL Ch.69, §64.53 ¶D) which had not been discussed or noted when the 2022 Updated Agreement was voted.
- The MVRHSC was trepidatious about having to pass 12 separate votes.
- The TFC was generally against an all Island majority vote which would leave Tisbury without leverage. In addition if the Tisbury debt exclusion ballot vote then failed, as much as \$3,100,000 would have to be cut from the Town operating budget—services, programs, staff...
- A similar Cape Cod-wide vote raised the hostility level of those who felt disenfranchised.
- Members also asked what would happen if the measure was approved and Tisbury had to default 2 years into the project.
- STM/ATM discussions were often a means to educate people and air options and information. There was a suggestion that the matter be raised in all STM/ATMs and then put to the all Island vote.
- If Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids forced a mass exodus of the Island's Brazilian population there would be a steep drop in student enrollment as well as a radical shift in Town enrollment proportions.
- A suggestion to submit the matter to the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC) was refuted as not within their legal authority.
- There were objections to short building and system lifespans (e.g. Heating/Ventilation/Air Conditioning—HVAC), which failed before their bond pay-out.
- Tisbury School Committee (TSC) Chair Amy Houghton spoke of “Post Traumatic Stress” from the difficult Tisbury School Project when the Town voted against and then refused MSBA funding—the secondary project leaving the Town in its current debt crisis.
- One mistake was to play down to the public the level of building need. When the original MSBA project proposal was rejected at the ballot some teachers refused to come to work unless unhealthy building conditions were addressed.

Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
September 17, 2025

5

- Statistics put in public record were ~~then~~ taken out of context by project opponents and used to distort the situation.
 - Due to local politics and inter-Town quarrels the Vineyard did not have a good reputation with the MSBA. The discussion explored failed vote options.
 - Re-application would be a long and probably unsuccessful process.
 - Inflation would increase Project cost each year.
 - The MSBA was interested in why projects failed and allowed a failed Project a 120 day reconsideration period to revise and/or revote the Project.
 - There was advocacy that a well-reimbursed base renovation option would be less expensive.
 - In anticipation of this Project and to avoid redundancy, current facility maintenance focused on safety and operability only. If this Project failed Towns could expect annual \$300,000+ warrant articles for more extensive repairs.
 - A number of actions and next steps were proposed.
 - Advocating with the Island's State House representatives would be a more beneficial use of taxpayer energy and time.
 - School funding was an Islandwide issue and should not be a political football for the larger regional discussion. Educating all Island voters was extremely important. For example:
 - conversations with Edgartown residents showed different attitudes than Town leadership statements;
 - This was also a problematically large debt for Aquinnah and Oak Bluffs.
- To that end the TFC could present to the AISC (see below: Actions & Meetings/Events), and would consider op-ed pieces in the press.
- Legal counsel could be consulted on regressive funding in education law.
 - The FinCom wanted a successful Project that was fair and equitable, and so were looking for the education community's aid in how to present it to voters.
 - Thanks were exchanged for the excellent conversation.

Oversight Committee for Financial Capacity Assessment

(See 8/20/25 Minutes p.6-7, & below: Actions.)

A committee was requested to oversee the "Ability to Pay Analysis"

- *ALLAN ROGERS MOVED TO APPOINT NANCY GILFOY, RICK HOMANS AND ALEX MELENEY AS AN OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE FOR THE FINANCIAL CAPACITY ASSESSMENT; RACHEL ORR SECONDED; MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY: 6 AYES, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSTENTIONS.*

**Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
September 17, 2025**

6

Updates

Meeting with Tisbury School Committee (TSC) – See above.

Asset Inventory (See 9/3/25 Minutes p. 4 & below: Actions.)

Town Administrator Joe LaCivita had begun to receive information for the asset inventory which he would start assembling by September 24th. The FinCom acknowledged the size and complexity of the task (see below: Actions). Rick Homans reported that Information Technology (IT) had no inventory of software or hardware assets, no records, depreciation or even capital replacement.

Meeting with Oak Bluffs Finance Committee Chair Bob Malecki

As the new Chair of the Oak Bluffs (OB) FinCom Bob Malecki was interested in the Embarkation bill status (see 10/13/22 Minutes) & 6/4/25 p.4)

- Oak Bluffs FinCom was discussing separating the schools from the rest of its Town operating budget in order to highlight spending and encourage conversation. The TFC noted the same actions in other municipalities, considering it an interesting and sound action.
- OB was also exploring Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILOTs) for non-profits (Martha's Vineyard Hospital, MVRHS, etc.). Vineyard Haven had: elder and Dukes County Regional Housing Authority (DCRHA) affordable housing, Vineyard Playhouse, and Martha's Vineyard Museum. There was Statewide precedent for the practice but PILOTs tended to be small and unenforceable.

Association of Town Finance Committees Annual Meeting

Elaine Miller and Rachel Orr were interested in attending (see below: Meeting/Events & Actions).

Committee Reports (See below: Actions.)

- The Collins Center had been hired to begin the new Finance Director search.
- The budget calendar was drafted and would be sent out as soon as it was approved. Department budgets were due to be submitted to Mr. LaCivita in December and would come to the FinCom in January. The FinCom requested a Free Cash estimate and Department FY25 turn-back amounts.

Future Meetings – See below Meetings/Events.

Items Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair – None

Adjournment

• *ALEX MELENEY MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 8:45PM; ALLAN ROGERS SECONDED; MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY: 6 AYES, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSTENTIONS.*

continued

**Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
September 17, 2025**

7

Appendix A: Meetings/Events

- AISC – 5:30PM, Thursday, September 25, 2025 – MVRHS Library Conference
- Special Town Meeting – 7:00PM, Tuesday, September 30, 2025 – Tis. School
- **TFC – 6:30PM, Wednesday, October 8, 2025 – TBD**
- Assoc. of Town FinComs – October 18, 2025 – Sharon, MA

Appendix B: Actions

Nancy – follow up w/Joe LaCivita re: asset inventory

- ask if he needs help/consultant.
- send Analysis Oversight Committee vote to Town Hall

Nancy – resend Assoc. of Town FinCom information to Elaine & Rachel.

MVRHS Project:

- All – Let Nancy know if you plan to attend the AISC meeting.
- Nancy – If necessary post 9/25/25 joint TFC/AISC meeting.
- Nancy/Alex/Rachel – consider MVRHS Project formula op-ed piece for press.
- All – talk to friends et al about MVRHS formula.
- Alex/Nancy – ask Town Counsel re: fair education regressive funding.

Nancy – budget season requests:

- Free Cash,
- Which Departments turned back FY25 funds & how much, e.g. actual spending plus budgeted amount.

All – recruit/recommend candidate for CPAC membership

All – please remember to not hit Reply All

Future Agendas

- Minutes: 9/3/25 as amended, 9/17/25

Previous/Long Term

- End-of-Year FY26 Transfers Report – Finance Director Jonathan Snyder
- MV Public Safety Communications as Town Budget line item
- FinCom Support for Fire Inspection Fee/Fine Update
- Wastewater/Water Works possible crew sharing
- Regional Building Inspector for ADU/Short-Term Rental compliance
- Personnel/TSB/Human Resources/TFC Meeting on Strategic Planning
- Letter re: specifying parameters of personal vehicles in staff contract clauses
- How will schools pay for EV bus charges
- Center For Living (September interview) and/or appoint FinCom Liaison
- Reserve Fund Requests (standard)

\$200,000 FY26 Reserve Fund spending tally – Balance: \$197,200

- 9/3/25 – DPW - \$2,800 – Survey stone wall Skiff Ave.

continued >

**Tisbury Finance & Advisory Committee
September 17, 2025**

8

Appendix C: Documents on File

- Agenda 9/17/25
- Proposed MVRHS Project Estimated Budget, based on 199,900 square foot
AR 1 (3 p.) 9/8/25
- Proposed MVRHS Project Estimated Budget, based on 199,900 square foot
AR 1 (3 p.) 9/10/25
- Gilfoy cover email re: Revised Power-Point handout 9/11/25
- RO Research and thoughts, Sept. 17, 2025(2 p.)
- Martha's Vineyard Regional high School (7 p.)

Nancy Gilfoy – Chair

Date

Minutes approved as amended 10/8/25