

To: **The Board of Selectmen, Town of Chilmark**

From: **Anne Cook, [REDACTED] South Road, Chilmark, MA 02535**

RE: **Testimonial and petition re: Use of Beetlebung Farm as Town Purchase**

Date: **September 23, 2018**

To the Selectmen:

I am writing after having received notice of the impending sale of Beetlebung Farm, which was for many years owned by my aunt Marie Fisher Scott's family, and that was recently placed on the market due to the family's financial strain in the wake of having to facilitate long-term care for the family matriarch, Rena Fisher, who recently passed away at the astoundingly tenacious age of 103.

As a native islander, artist, and supporter of culturally inclusive ventures—as well as being someone who hopes the island can offer sustainable housing for those of us who are connected to and invested in the island as a mystical place worthy of “character preservation” yet who are, frankly, not wealthy— I wanted to submit a testimonial/petition with a suggestion that I ran by my father, Peter B. Cook, last year, related to **affordable housing approaches that might be best suited for Chilmark's particular balance of conservation of rural farm, field, and woodlands and its longstanding character as a haven for artists.**

I am recommending the Selectmen, and the Town as a whole, seriously consider purchasing the property with an eye toward a “multi-use” purpose: namely, limited-occupancy (fewer than 10 units) housing for families in which one or more members are artists or musicians (thus allowing for couples in which one person may be a tradesperson, teacher, policeman or fireman) combined with community rooms for classes and other activities. Along with such a “design for living,” a modest garden/farm could also be part of the concept, including perhaps the “goat grazing” tour and/or other similar initiatives such as allowing sheep herds to graze as part of the rural preservation efforts I have witnessed on the island in recent years. As a painter, I can say that such pastoral management is also attractive as subject matter for painters and other artists. In the latter period during which she ran Beetlebung Farm, my aunt Marie kind of set the tone by establishing alongside her farm stand a modest exhibition space for her charming, small paintings of bucolic Vineyard and Vermont landscapes.

I recommend offering such potential rental units on a rotating basis (such as two-year leases), so that such housing could be a means of temporarily stable means of transition for families without becoming the equivalent of “ownership,” which would cause a small group to become entrenched. It would be fair-minded and considered a privilege for said renters, who would pass on the experience to the next family groups, to allow for a more widely enjoyed experience on the part of diverse families whose presence in the Town would be a contribution to the preservation and appreciation of Chilmark's unique historical identity as a town of farms and natural beauty unspoiled by “over-building.” In fact, should Chilmark be able to include in its affordable housing proposals a formalized, legal “right to preserve” the

town's **historic** character, then incorporating art and artisanal housing as part of that legacy would arguably be absolutely in line with such a mission. To be clear, I am recommending (if it has not already been done) designating the entire Beetlebung Corner area, if not a greater expanse to include Menemsha and swaths of North, Middle, South and State Roads, as a **historic district**. In that event, I would think the Town would be able to exercise more control in determining the tenancy requirements related to affordable housing.

Let me further add, in signing off, that the next generation of art promoters, producer and practitioners, such as myself—whether we were born on the Vineyard, as I was, or have otherwise demonstrated a commitment to sharing the experience of the arts with our peers, and with adults and children in the community and among seasonal visitors—needs to be given some ability to participate as leaders in those efforts. As things stand, in my experience of the island's recent socio-economic changes, I believe it's important to guard against a kind of "monopoly" by a few, often financially comfortable, individuals and groups over WHO and WHAT are allowed to contribute to the arts scene. I would certainly want to be given the opportunity to "interview" for any management or creative partnership role in such an endeavor, alongside other like minds. My recent grant and series of songwriting workshops for youth on the island, as well as my work in the music community facilitating unusual groups of performers at Pathways and Mikado, are just several demonstrations of my **inclusive** attitude. Included in my work with youth is a desire to help mitigate the negative influences affecting young people on the island, from bullying to substance abuse issues by offering engaging activities that build skills that can be part of a young person's empowerment over a lifetime.

From my perspective, and again from recent experience on the island, it is essential **to guard against favoritism** in such missions and to ensure that a range of diverse contributors can participate in the island's cultural and social lifeblood without censure. Some of the existing arts organizations and entities have made such inclusion challenging, due to favoritism keeping the circles of inclusion often insular, the channels of decision-making held tightly in the hands of small pods of individuals whose personal prejudices toward others in the community are obstacles to wider creative contributions. I mention this now, since you are likely to receive a number of petitions regarding use of this property as they relate to the arts. The island would benefit from an arts-related place and space that is not treated as a fiefdom by a small nucleus of people; an unsettling trend that some of us feel is important to push back against. Fair representation and a sense of inclusive generosity are my guiding principles in service to the Vineyard's true spirit. I am currently dividing my time between the Boston area and the island, and part of the reason I have had to take some space from the island is directly related to the exclusionary behavior of some arts and potential employment entities that would, in a more ideal atmosphere, be "safe" for any of us with the requisite experience and goodwill to participate in. I simply have a different world view than the motivations that drive such entities, and I am lucky to have allies in that regard within the Vineyard community. I believe we offer a vision that serves as a foundation for hope and empowerment for current and future generations.

I would appreciate receiving notice via email at [a\[REDACTED\]@msn.com](mailto:a[REDACTED]@msn.com) of any related public discussions on this matter.

Regards,

Anne (Annie) Cook

