**Aquinnah Board of Health**

**Minutes**

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023**

**4 PM via zoom**

**Present:** Gerald Green (Chair), Kathy Newman, Jim Benoit, Marina Lent (staff), Adam Turner, Rachel Sorrentino

**Physical Address, Map/Lot number:**

**Applicant**:  Oberg

**Description**: proposed septic system expansion for existing 4br Main house and existing 2 br guest house to be expanded to 3 bedrooms; the existing tank & pit serving the guest house will be replaced with a 1,500g tank and tied in to the 2015 leachfield, which will be expanded to accommodate the additional bedrooms.

**Variances Requested**: no variances required.

**Motions and Votes**: The Board unanimously **approved** the proposed plan, and asked Marina Lent to have the engineer inform the homeowner that the property is within the Squibnocket watershed and may be subject to DEP-required nitrogen-reducing technology in the foreseeable future.

**Section 208 Up-Island Wastewater Management Plan:** The Board heard an update from MVC Director Adam Turner and wastewater specialist Rachel Sorrentino of Part Two of the Up-Island Wastewater Management Plan. Part Two, the so-called “Solutions Report,” outlines various options which could be deployed to reduce nitrogen in the Menemsha and Squibnocket Ponds.

Under state requirements, of the 350kg/year of total ntg entering Squibnocket Pond, 190/kg/year reduction is required in order to meet the “Total Maximum Daily Limit” set to designate health of a given pond. This goal is unattainable, as a significant proportion of that ntg cannot be locally controlled (ie rainwater, wild animals near/in the pond, etc). Onsite septic systems remain a major source of *controllable* nitrogen, since these systems use fresh drinking water to convey nitrogen-rich urine deep underground, beyond the reach of plant root uptake. There, it flows in the groundwater, at the rate of ca. 1’ per year, towards the ocean via large coastal ponds.

The following options to reduce this groundwater nitrogen are covered in the report:

* Intercepting and treating it in the groundwater prior to its leaching into the Pond, which can be done with a judiciously-placed permeable reactive barrier. This has been done successfully in Tisbury. Success is dependent on adequate preparation to identify the best possible placement for the barrier, as nitrogen tends to flow in plumes of varying concentration.
* Phragmites can take up nitrogen from groundwater and surface water entering the pond. In order to reduce nitrogen, they must be harvested at their maximum uptake, since leaving them in place will replace the nitrogen they took up when the plants die.
* Oysters concentrate nitrogen nutrients. Again, if the oysters are not *removed* from the pond in their prime, all the nitrogen they took up to live off of will return into the water when their dead bodies disintegrate post-mortem.
* Seaweed harvesting could also remove nutrients taken up by the plants, but, like the options above is labor intensive.
* Recent amendments to Title 5 put forward nitrogen reducing onsite septic systems as a requirement for watersheds that have not identified alternative nitrogen reduction in the form of a 20-year watershed management plan, approved by the state and closely monitored throughout its lifetime.

The Board asked the MVC whether and how the Tribe’s important interest in the maintenance of the herring run is being accommodated; the MVC assured the Board that they are working closely with tribal officials on this matter. Another Board member noted that the recent heavy weather has already opened Squibnocket Pond to the ocean at the Chilmark Squibnocket Beach causeway.

The Board also noted possible local regulatory options that could contribute to nitrogen reduction, such as requiring new construction to install “best available” nitrogen-reducing septic systems. The Board felt that this issue is a significant ongoing concern, and will keep the question on its agenda for regular consideration.

**IIPHEC:** The Board unanimously approved the appointment of **Health Agent Fernando Lana,** Public Health Educator under the Inter-Island Public Health Excellence Collaborative, to be empowered to conduct inspections in Aquinnah.

**Public Health Disaster Preparedness:**  The Board unanimously approved the appointment of Alternate Public Health **Emergency Preparedness Officer Chief Randhi Belaine.**

**Opioid Inter-Municipal Agreement** – The Board unanimously **approved** a decision on the use of MV funds for SUD mitigation island-wide, through an Inter-Municipal Agreement (IMA) among the six towns, administered by the County. The funding will support staffing for the longstanding SUD Coalition, which is comprised of leading social service agencies, healthcare, Police, public health and community volunteers, among others. Under the IMA, each Board of Health will nominate a primary and secondary representative to sit on a board managing the grant funding on behalf of the Town and the County.