

## **CREATING A VILLAGE CENTER FOR AQUINNAH**

### **Why do we need a new Village Center in Aquinnah?**

Aquinnah is the westernmost town on Martha's Vineyard, a small, tight-knit, multi-generational community with less than 500 year-round residents. Nearly 25% are members of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head/Aquinnah who have lived on this land for many thousands of years.

It is a special place beloved by its people, but there are few places for our townspeople to gather together year-round. The nearest grocery store in the winter months is a 25 minute drive away. There are no restaurants or shops open in the off-season. We have no functioning play space for our children. Our little library—a former one-room schoolhouse—is the beating heart of our winter town, but is only open three half-days a week. Social isolation for elders, for caregivers home with young children, and others is a real challenge.

There is a shared sense among town residents that we need a new space to gather, to play, and to celebrate together. The Parks & Recreation Committee, with the full support of town leadership and voters, is working to make this vision a reality by developing a new Village Center in the heart of the town.

### **What is the plan for the Village Center?**

The Village Center will be located on a parcel of town-owned land right behind the Town Offices, Police Station, and Town Hall. It will include a new accessible playground, a pavilion, a food forest, benches, and walking paths. The town's Affordable Housing Committee is working on an affordable housing development adjacent to the Village Center.

The design for the Village Center was created through a two-year community planning process, guided by the Conway School of Landscape Design and playground design experts Leathers & Associates. Over 80 townspeople, including children, helped develop the plan. We have created a vision that we believe in and are eager to bring to life.

In this new Village Center, children will have a fun, safe, and accessible place to play. Parents and caregivers will have a place to sit and keep an eye on their kids while talking with one another. Elders will have a place to visit, walk on maintained paths, and interact with other townspeople of all ages. Our covered pavilion will give us a place to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, to share picnics, to visit with friends. The Food Forest will provide a living example of how we can all contribute to food security using traditional methods in our own yards, while producing fresh food and medicinal plants for townspeople to enjoy.

In a small town with limited off-season services, having a central place where we can come together will reduce isolation while building and sustaining the relationships that make our community special.

### **Where are we in the process?**

Now that we have finalized our plans for the Center, we are moving into implementation mode. We have begun the work of clearing for the food forest and playground areas. We are ready to install fencing that will secure the boundaries as well as prevent deer and other local wildlife from foraging in the food forest. We plan to have this completed before the winter of 2022. Once the fencing is installed, we will be able to begin plantings for the food forest, starting in the spring of 2023, when we also plan to hold a community building festival to construct our new playground.

### **Funding needs**

Fundraising for the Village Center is underway. The total cost for the Center, including the planning, clearing, and construction of the playground, pavilion, benches, food forest, is \$383,000. To date, we have raised almost half of the funds we need, and are now seeking support to raise the remaining \$200,000 to make our Village Center a reality.

Donations can be made to the Town of Aquinnah and mailed to the Town of Aquinnah, c/o Parks and Recreation Committee, 955 State Road, Aquinnah MA 02535, with "Village Center" in the memo line.

We hope you will join us in creating this special space for the people of Aquinnah and the rest of our Martha's Vineyard community.