



April 14, 2025
Mr. Adam Turner
Martha's Vineyard Commission

Greetings,

I am writing this letter to share Healthy Aging Martha's Vineyard's perspective on the Edgartown Gardens proposal to build a 55+ Affordable + Market Ownership development in Edgartown. Our comments are focused specifically on the design viability for 55+ housing and do not address the impact of traffic or other issues raised.

Our two major concerns with the proposal submitted relate to 1) that a 55+ development is truly fit-for-purpose for Older Adults 55+ as their housing needs evolve and 2) making certain that the Island's Older Adults are given priority for such a development if indeed it goes forward.

Our island's Older Adult population is growing and aging. Additional housing options and increased housing capacity, for both long-term homeowners and new-to-home-ownership Older Adults in principle are beneficial. Creating additional capacity for second homeowners 55+ does not address the needs of our year-round community members.

However, there are deficits in the proposal submitted associated with truly creating accessible living spaces for Older Adults whose mobility challenges often increase as they age. The proposal lacks basic "universal design" that will ensure accessibility for both residents as well as those who visit the development. While the developers state there will be "ADA accessibility provided throughout the site and Upper Main Street businesses" that is not clarified nor is it enough. For example, the current design lacks any elevators or specifics on accessibility into and within the buildings.

Universal design for mobility and accessibility aims to create environments, products, and services that are usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. This approach focuses on incorporating design features from the outset that benefit a broad range of users, including those with disabilities, seniors, and people with temporary impairments. By considering diverse needs and abilities, universal design promotes inclusivity, reduces barriers, and improves the overall user experience for everyone. (See, in general, <https://dac.berkeley.edu/services/campus-building-accessibility/universal-design-principles>, downloaded April 14, 2025)





Some of the elements we are accustomed to seeing in 55+ housing developments for Older Adults include:

- a. Single level units
- b. Elevators in each building
- c. Wider doorways and hallways (for wheelchairs and walkers)
- d. Bathrooms that have no-step shower entries, grab bars, and lower counters/cabinets
- e. Lever door handles
- f. Bright lighting
- g. Slip-resistant surfaces
- h. Lower kitchen counters/cabinets
- i. Wider parking slots and well-lit parking areas

Secondly, there are no provisions in the proposal to ensure that Older Adult islanders have priority purchasing these units, whether they are affordable or at market rates. To truly address the island-wide housing shortage, eliminating barriers to downsizing and purchase must also be addressed.

We encourage the Commission to request that the developers update their plans addressing these issues with the following approach: *“Our design goal is to create highly accessible living spaces which meet the needs of Older Adults who require additional accommodations.”*

Thank you,

Cindy Trish

Cindy Trish
Executive Director
Healthy Aging Martha's Vineyard

