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Chilmark Select Board
Town Hall - Front Desk

March 3rd, 2024
To: Chilmark Selectmen
Regarding the available commercial lot
From: Casey Elliston

Dear Selectmen,

Thank you for reading my letter. I am writing to apply for Pat Jenkinson's commercial lot.

My name is Casey Elliston. I was born and raised in Chilmark, and I still live here today with my partner, Julia, and our three-year-old son, Winston. I am a rod and reel commercial fisherman.

The first fish I ever caught was on the Menemsha jetty, with a rod from the Texaco. It was the day before fifth grade. The day my life changed because I found the thing I love most: fishing. When I came off the jetty with my fish, Cecil French (who worked and still works at the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries) introduced himself to me and told me I should become a commercial fisherman. The very next day, my dad put his name on the waitlist for the recreational slips, assuming that it could someday be transferred to me. I myself have been on the commercial slip list ever since I was made aware that my dad's slip couldn't be transferred to me. Right now, I'm third on the list. (Also, this is not the first time I've applied for a lot. In 2018, I applied for lot 3A, which entailed sending letters and participating in a selectmen's meeting, but it went to an oyster farmer).

After that day as a kid, I started fishing off of the docks constantly. There, Everett Poole taught me to catch striped bass with scraps of bait, right in front of Jimmy Morgan's boat. Eventually, I was fortunate to make good relationships with some of the older fishermen, like John Larsen, who often let me fish right off of their boats. I hope to be a mentor to younger fishermen someday like they were to me.

My focus as a rod and reel commercial fisherman is on (in no order) scup, squid, bluefish, bonita, yellowfin tuna, bluefin tuna, striped bass, and bay scallops. I've also been offered an opportunity to have a stake in an oyster farm, though my primary focus will always be on rod and reel fishing.

The reason I need the lot is simple. It would make my job as a fisherman so much easier, smoother, safer, more efficient, and more productive. Right now, I have nowhere to put my gear. I fish out of an open boat with no storage. I've had rods and reels stolen off of the docks multiple times (and I filed a police report one of those times). My safety gear takes up a lot of space and can't be left outside. If I go offshore, it takes two days to drive back and forth from my house just to make sure I have everything on my boat.

But the fact is, this challenge is not unique to me. All of the fishermen in Menemsha face it. So I'd like to tell you why I think I'm a qualified candidate who is deserving of this opportunity.

The first reason is that I love Menemsha. In 2010, when the old Coast Guard building caught on fire, I was working on my boat in between fishing trips. I immediately sprung into action by hauling ten different boats off of the drive on dock, risking my life as fuel tanks literally blew up next to me and shrapnel hit the side of my boat. But it was important to me to help my fellow fishermen in a way I hope they'd have helped me. I've always taken so much pride in being part of the Menemsha community, and I care about it deeply.

The second reason is that there are not many rod and reel commercial fishermen out of Menemsha anymore, I think it's vital to the history of our community to continue supporting rod and reel fishermen. It's great that so many people are oyster farming now, but I don't think rod and reel fishermen should be forgotten. On that note, I always make a point of including other young fishermen to come out on trips with me in the hopes that I can teach them and give them an opportunity to commercial fish. More than ever, rod and reel fishermen in Menemsha need the town's support.

The third reason is that I think I've shown over my lifetime that I understand the difference between a privilege and a right. Having this lot would be a great privilege and an honor, and one that I would not take for granted. I understand that having it would mean that I would be responsible for something very public facing in Menemsha, and I would not let the town down by letting the lot look bad or become an unsafe place. It would be very important to me to take incredible care of the lot and make it a space that the town would be proud of. I'm a firm believer in giving back, especially when things have been given to you. I've started the process with the Chilmark Fire Department and promised the Chief that I would devote at least five years of being a volunteer fire fighter as soon as I pass the firefighter course. This is an example of my devotion to this town.

While the purpose of this letter is to apply for the lot, I also want to raise the issue that I've found it really difficult to even have an opportunity to express interest for the lot at all. It seems to me that there should be some kind of coordination between the commercial slip waitlist and these commercial lots (I believe that the two people ahead of me on the commercial slip waitlist either have a lot or are leasing one). Any active commercial fisherman, especially one who has fished out of Menemsha their whole life and has been on a waitlist already, should be given a fair chance when the opportunity arises.

Thank you for considering me and taking the time to read this. I appreciate all that you do for our town.

Best,

Casey Elliston