

**Chilmark Town Affairs Council Statement to Select Board in Response to Tennis  
Petition to Town  
January 16, 2024**

Thank you for the opportunity to address the issue of this petition. The Chilmark Town Affairs Council (CTAC) was created around 1956 as the non-profit organization to oversee the operations of the Chilmark Community Center and it has played this role ever since, in agreement with the Town. Since the Center's founding, for almost 70 years, CTAC has been responsible for the Center's operations and its tennis programs.

This proposal, in light of CTAC's longstanding success in running the Community Center, as well as the change in Town by-laws that it requires and the type of financial oversight built into the proposal, should raise serious questions for the Select Board, its taxpayers, and the hundreds and hundreds of families who have benefited from Community Center programs over the years. The proposed changes would unnecessarily upend the Community Center's programs as we know them.

Any consideration of a change in the operation of the Center's tennis programs must be carefully scrutinized for its legal and practical implications, should not be rushed, and should only be contemplated with full understanding of all of its implications. We respectfully ask that the Select Board ensure proper time for a full understanding of this petition and what it would mean for the Town and for the use of this vital facility for the community.

CTAC has worked diligently to be a responsible steward of the Center; to be welcoming and accessible to all families and children, and to build community. In 2021, the Center adopted Our Plan Going Forward which was discussed and endorsed by the Select Board. This Plan has guided CTAC's decisions and we have made a renewed commitment to safety, diversity, accessibility, inclusion and belonging. The approach suggested in this petition is inconsistent with CTAC's values.

**The CCC Tennis Facilities**

The petition appears to assume that the new entity would have exclusive use of the Community Center tennis facilities. Those facilities are largely the property of CTAC with the exception that the all-weather courts have shared ownership with the Town. CTAC constructed, owns (except as noted regarding the all-weather courts), maintains and operates the tennis courts and tennis shack. While these structures are on Town land they are the real property of CTAC. To illustrate:

- The tennis courts are listed on CTAC's audited financial statements as an asset valued at \$510,000.
- The tennis shack was rebuilt in 2019 at a cost to CTAC of almost \$400,000.
- CTAC insures these facilities at a cost of about \$18,000 annually.
- CTAC annually spends about \$10,000 on maintenance of the courts.
- Through fundraising efforts, CTAC makes capital improvements to all of the Community Center facilities for which it is responsible.

Do those responsible for the proposal contemplate that they or the Town would compensate or purchase these facilities from CTAC?

Beyond rights of ownership, CTAC operates the courts and other facilities on the Center grounds, with the exception of the CCC building, under an agreement between the Town and CTAC that has been in place since 1956, and was further codified in a 2018 MOU. We do not understand how the Town would be at liberty to take these facilities from CTAC or give them to someone else to manage.

## **CTAC Tennis Programs**

### **Children's Programs**

In the summer, CTAC runs a successful, highly regarded program for about 200 children daily with tennis as a key component. The Center each summer employs over 70 counselors and staff. The camp is a state licensed day camp meeting all Massachusetts requirements and with all counselors reference-checked and CORI (criminal offender record information act) and SORI (sex offender register information) certified. Children have the option of playing tennis each day; some children spend the full day on the courts. CTAC also offers an afternoon tennis camp, and a two week tennis camp at the end of the summer.

The petition appears to contemplate that the children's tennis program would now be operated by the Tennis Court Committee under a separate camp, and apparently leaving CTAC with the rest of the camp to run. The practicality of running two separate camps on the same premises raises significant concerns. Two summer camps on the same facility with limited space and resources poses safety and logistical challenges, and is unnecessarily complicated.

- Who is accountable for which children?
- Where do the tennis players go for snacks, restrooms, rest?
- Whose insurance is covering these children?
- Are the tennis staff employees of the Town?

Running a camp takes administrative expertise, systems, experience, staffing and financial resources. CTAC has these resources; a newly formed three member tennis committee with a revolving fund does not.

### **Adult Programs**

CTAC also runs a summer tennis program for adults with at least 70 players each day. Due to demand, CTAC has extended the adult tennis season to provide administrative support. CTAC hires adult tennis instructors and tennis shack staff who manage registration, court usage, and book private lessons. Some tennis instructors who work at camp also provide private lessons for children and adults. CTAC has invested in software, communications equipment, and tennis equipment to meet the needs of the adult program. Separate operation of the adult summer program is inefficient and creates coordination complexities.

### **Off-season Tennis**

Throughout the off-season, many adults and young people now play tennis on the Center's courts. Through CTAC's aforementioned MOU with the Town, one individual (the Tennis Pro)

has been given the right to “run tennis clinics and give private tennis lessons on the clay tennis courts” in September - November and April 15 - June; and he is also responsible for providing maintenance of the clay courts. This individual has the right of usage as long as he is employed by CTAC in the summer as the Tennis Pro.

In actuality, the clinics and lessons run by the Tennis Pro take place throughout the fall, winter and spring, initially on the clay courts and then, as the weather changes, on the all-weather courts. This makes them unavailable for all other tennis play. Consistent with CTAC’s values, we believe the all-weather courts should be open to the public for off-season usage, free of charge, and not be the exclusive domain of one individual who is profiting from the Community Center tennis facilities. The courts should not be managed as a private club but should be accessible to everyone.

### **Conclusion**

CTAC remains committed to its path of almost 70 years of stewardship providing inclusive, fun, and safe recreational activities to the Chilmark community. The proposal undermines CTAC’s proven track record and disregards the community’s trust and reliance on CTAC’s expertise in delivering inclusive and enriching programs. We urge the Select Board to ensure that the Town has the time to fully consider the critical issues that this petition raises including the legal ramifications of ownership rights, the historical success of CTAC’s tennis program, and the practical challenges of the proposed operational changes.