

Chilmark Community Preservation Committee
Application for CPA Funds

Project Title: Old Mill Safety Improvements

Date: 10/3/23

Applicant/Contact Person: Susan Hobart

Sponsoring Organization: Martha's Vineyard Garden Club (MVGC)

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CPA FUND CATEGORIES:

Historic Resources Preservation:

The Martha's Vineyard Garden Club acquired the Old Mill in 1942 to save it from demolition. Since then, the Club restored and maintains the Old Mill. In 1982 the Club registered it on the National Register of Historic Places.

The 1840's Old Mill in West Tisbury is the only surviving granary, then weaving, mill on Martha's Vineyard. It is an underutilized island treasure which has not been updated to meet current building or safety standards. Although restored and structurally sound, the Old Mill would be safer and more attractive as a meeting venue with some improvements. The safety of the interior stairs, load-bearing capacity of the upper level due to beam span, and moisture and mold in the lower level have been concerns for several years. In addition, the building has no running water, heating, or plumbing, so is used only June through September. The parking area and walkway do not provide handicap access.

This is the first phase of a comprehensive plan to improve the Old Mill based on a Building Feasibility Assessment completed by Sullivan + Associates Architects and Sourati Engineering Group. In 2022 the West Tisbury Community Preservation Committee awarded the Garden Club a \$20,000 grant for the study. The objective was an analysis of structural needs plus consideration of a wish list that included a restroom and utility sink (in the past, water was pumped from the stream to an interior sink then drained outside), climate control and other features which could expand the building's useful season and offer the Old Mill for public events not under the umbrella of the Garden Club. The Club's goal is to make the building and the surrounding property more accessible to the public.

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Open Space Preservation

The Garden Club's Old Mill property consists of two predominantly wetland parcels totaling approximately 2.1 acres with two streams running through it. The Old Mill building is located on the small parcel near the road which runs over the earthen Mill Pond Dam. The northern wall of the Old Mill is the downstream side of the Mill Pond Dam. The other parcel encompasses the driveway, parking area and streamside lawn. Ferns, clethra and other native plants line the stream and stonewalls.

The Garden Club maintains the land with funds from dues, donations and fundraisers. Several years ago, after repeated incidents of squatting and vandalism, the Club installed a locked gate to the parking lot entrance.

Open Space – Parks and Recreation

The streamside lawn has benches and is used by the Club for small gatherings during the summer. It has the potential of being a lovely picnic area if the building were opened to the public. The Club could expand the native plantings and label them as the basis for an educational wetland garden retreat. The stream and benches are a lovely setting for outdoor meetings and activities. A wooded path connects the West Tisbury library and the Old Mill.

FUNDING SCOPE

The assessment report, which is included with this application, defines a roadmap for Old Mill improvements. To undertake all improvements identified in the report would cost more than \$200,000. The budget for Phase I is \$80,000 and specifically addresses safety concerns.

This grant will be used to rebuild the Old Mill's interior stairs to meet the current building code, upgrade the electric service to run dehumidifiers and fans, and thus improve the safety and accessibility of the Old Mill.

Likely original to the building, the stairs are steep and narrow with patched treads, and abut the original irregular rock wall of the dam. To alleviate falling risk on the stairs, the Club recently designated the interior stairs one way up, and newer exterior stairs as the exit from the building's upper floor.

The project will include the following:

- Rebuild the stairs to meet the current code:
 - Widen the stairs to 48"
 - Extend the length of the stairs to comply with current run and rise specifications
 - Remove 4' of steel ceiling beam to accommodate head room for increased stair run

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- Install steel post to support beam that was cut
- Install dehumidifiers to alleviate moisture and mold in basement level meeting area
- Add ceiling fans on both levels to improve air flow
- Upgrade electric to 200 amps if required.

The breakout of costs from the assessment report is as follows:

Item	Details	Amount
Architectural Drawings	Sullivan/Sourati	\$10,000
Rebuild stairs to code	Contractors TBD	\$20,000
Upgrade electric to 200 amps	Contractor TBD	\$25,000
Install dehumidifiers and fans	Contractors TBD	\$20,000
Contingency		\$5,000
PROJECT TOTAL		\$80,000

The Club has identified several potential sources of funding for this project. Two members have each pledged \$10,000 for the Old Mill, which will enable the project to commence early in 2024 with the architectural and engineering drawings.

Jane Bradbury, who has a home on South Water Street in Edgartown will host a benefit gala on August 1, 2024. Her home is significant both because of the beautiful landscaping and "Union Jack" garden, as well as having been the home of the Garden Club's first president, Mrs. Miekelham, who led the effort to rescue the Old Mill from demolition by purchasing it in 1942.

Because Garden Club participation is island wide, the Club is requesting \$10,000 from each town's Community Preservation Committee. The Club also applied to the Martha's Vineyard Community Foundation for \$10,000.

Source of Funds	Target Amount	Committed	Comment
Donations	\$30,000	\$20,000	
Benefit Gala 8/1/24	\$20,000		Planning underway
Community Preservation Funds	\$10,000 from each town		Chilmark, Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, Tisbury, W. Tisbury
MV Community Foundation grant	\$10,000		Submitted application

The Garden Club's major ongoing financial obligations are the Old Mill, which the Club solely owns, and the Wakeman Center. The Garden Club is part of the Wakeman Foundation agreement and a tenant of the Wakeman Center, where it holds its winter meetings and has sole use of the greenhouse.

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The Wakeman Foundation is responsible for heat, water and electricity to the greenhouse, but the Club is responsible for structural repairs. The greenhouse hasn't been improved in several years, and some repair will be required in 2024. The 2024 budget will be developed in October.

The Garden Club P&L for 2022 is included with this application. The 2023 budget allocation for the Old Mill is \$16,625 and Wakeman Center rent is \$6,200. The Garden Club has a reserve intended for emergencies.

The Club's primary sources of income are fundraisers, membership dues and donations. Several times over the past decade the Club has tapped into the reserve to cover expenses.

The Garden Club hosted a very successful Edgartown Garden Stroll in August, which cleared \$14,000 after expenses. This was an inaugural event that was not included in the 2023 budget but will make 2023 a profitable year. These funds will be allocated among operating expenses, Wakeman Center greenhouse repairs and possibly the Old Mill.

GOALS

The Garden Club Board recognizes that owning and maintaining the Old Mill has become too large a financial burden and outside the Club's mission. By opening the Old Mill to the public on a limited basis, the building could pay for itself.

The Club's vision is to make this remarkable historic building an attraction available to islanders for community and other events. Members are extremely proud that the Club was able to protect this island treasure and want it to continue to be enjoyed.

Long term, the Club's goal is to partner with Vineyard Preservation Trust or another nonprofit in which the Club would be a tenant and no longer responsible for owning the building.

Garden Club members were surveyed on their priorities regarding changes to the Old Mill. Most members indicated support for transferring ownership of the Old Mill if the Club could continue as a tenant.

Members were also asked what improvements to the Old Mill they considered most important. The improvements that were most often cited were a restroom and new interior stairs, followed by climate control and handicap parking.

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COMMUNITY NEED AND SUPPORT

In 2022 the West Tisbury Community Preservation Committee provided support to the Old Mill with a \$20,000 grant to evaluate the building's condition. At the annual meeting in August, members voted and unanimously approved the plan to bring the stairs up to code rather than simply repairing them.

Martha's Vineyard Garden Club is an island-wide, all-volunteer, 501(c)(3) organization established in 1924 and the island's oldest conservation organization. The Garden Club has more than 200 members representing all island towns. Through expansion of programs, a newsletter and increased social media presence, the Club has increased membership by 65% from 2021.

The Garden Club's mission is:

to protect and enhance the beauty and natural assets of the Island of Martha's Vineyard by providing educational programs in conservation and horticulture; by encouraging community interest in and understanding of environmental problems; by supporting community efforts to protect our Island's environment and by taking a position on legislation affecting the environment.

Members share a passion for conservation, gardening, and maintaining the Vineyard's unique environment. Meetings and events are both educational and social, with varied programs designed to meet personal and community needs.

Unfortunately, the Mill is underutilized and unknown to most island residents and visitors. It is opened for two Garden Club fundraising events, three to four presentations, and a few casual gatherings July through September. Outside speakers and their topics at the Old Mill this year are well attended, often address island concerns, and align tightly with the Club's mission:

- July: Samantha Look, Vineyard Conservation Society: *Love Song for the Vineyard Lawn*
- August: Liz Durkee, MV Commission: *Climate Change and the Natural Environment*
- September: John Forti, Ex. Dir. Bedrock Gardens & Author of the Heirloom Gardener Book: *Heirloom Gardening with Traditional Plants and Skills*

The Club's signature annual fundraiser is Blooming Art, which is held in the Old Mill and was first held over 20 years ago. Approximately 35 Vineyard artists exhibit their works for sale, and Club members create floral designs to interpret each piece of art. More than 500 paid visitors came to this year's show, which lasted three days in June.

The Club also hosts a public Memorial Day weekend plant sale at the Old Mill, for which all plants have been grown locally in the Wakeman Center greenhouse by Garden Club members. Approximately 100 island residents visited the plant sale this year.

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The Old Mill is a historic gem that is well-loved by Garden Club members and guests who have the privilege of visiting it, and an extraordinarily well-preserved piece of Martha's Vineyard history.

The third mill on this location, and originally a granary mill, it last manufactured satinet from wool supplied by the nearby sheep farm. Satinet is a dense fabric that was used by sailors in the whaling industry. Several pieces of the original equipment used to make satinet still reside in the building.

In the future, an "Old Mill Day" or an exhibit portraying 19th century manufacturing life could be a teaching opportunity for school children as well as the public.

People occasionally ask if it is available for personal celebrations, community events and recreational activities such as art or craft shows, but the Board has not made it available due to concerns about the current condition of the building. The Old Mill is an excellent small venue and could potentially be used by other nonprofit organizations for their fundraising programs.

TIMING

The Old Mill is used by the Club from mid-June into September. Most of the work will be done after September but installing dehumidifiers prior to summer humidity would be desirable. Construction of the stairs cannot commence until after the September meeting due to complexity of the project. An assumption is that vendors can begin work with the commitment of payment after July 1.

Action	Tentative Schedule
Prepare architecture, engineering drawings and secure approvals	1Q2024
Select electrician, evaluate electric	1Q2024
Upgrade electric	May/June
Select plumber, obtain permit & install dehumidifiers	May/June
Install fans	October - May
Select carpenter & obtain permits for stairs	September
Begin construction of stairs	October
Complete project	May 2025