In its first public listening session, members of the Coalition to Create the Martha’s Vineyard Housing Bank gave a presentation on their “first draft parameters” to more than 140 attendees via Zoom, and fielded wide-ranging questions from the public.

The coalition is the third attempt at a housing bank on Martha’s Vineyard, and comes amid a growing affordable housing crisis on the Island. The first endeavor in 2005 struck an agreement with all six Island towns and many Island real estate agents, but was shot down by the state legislature when the Massachusetts Association of Realtors lobbied against it. The second attempt came in 2019, following the expanded rooms excise tax on rentals such as Airbnb and VRBO. That proposal asked for 50 percent of the new revenue generated by the tax, but was swiftly dismissed by select board members across the Island before being defeated by five towns at annual town meetings. West Tisbury approved the 2018 effort, but then...
rescinded its vote to send it to committee.

Steering committee member Doug Ruskin said the coalition has been working with a subcommittee and its steering committee to flesh out the parameters of what a future housing bank could look like.

While nothing is set in stone, Ruskin said the coalition sees a future housing bank being modeled after the Martha’s Vineyard Land Bank. The governance would consist of seven commissioners — one elected member from each town, plus a state appointee.

There would also be six community advisory boards, one from each town, with seven appointed members from the select boards, conservation commissions, affordable housing committees, health departments, planning boards, and zoning boards. Housing bank governance would review proposals from organizations, individuals, and public entities to ensure such proposals meet all requirements and serve all types of applicants.

“The key here is the advisory boards would have veto power over any projects,” Ruskin said. “While the whole body of commissioners would be vetting proposals, nothing would happen in a particular town without the advisory board’s OK.”

The housing bank could receive proposals, provide funding for housing infrastructure, provide shared-precipitation equity loans, and purchase, receive, hold, lease, grant, and sell properties.

Any housing bank-funded project would have to be deed-restricted to be occupied year-round and at a specific income level. Properties would also pay their share of property taxes.

To keep the overhead low, the Land Bank has agreed to do the administrative work associated with fee collections, should a housing bank be established.

The focus would be on previously developed properties, projects that mitigate climate change, and projects that have state-of-the-art wastewater systems.

The funding mechanism would consist of a 2 percent transfer fee paid by the buyer, same as the Land Bank, but on only all dollars above $1 million — a home purchased for $999,999 would be exempt from the fee, while a home purchased for $1.2 million would be taxed 2 percent on $200,000. Coalition campaign coordinator Laura Silber said it could create an up to $10 million annual revenue stream. The proposed housing bank would also revisit its exemption thresholds every five years.

The housing bank would not develop, remodel, reha-

Coalition steering committee member Doug Ruskin, shown here at a 2018 hospital forum, outlined what a housing bank on the island could look like.

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