

THE POLLY HILL ARBORETUM

Staff Housing Initiative



Case Statement

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Honoring Our Past, Meeting Future Challenges

As the Polly Hill Arboretum (PHA) heads towards its 25th year as a public garden, we celebrate our progress and look toward a bright future. Currently PHA is a vital public garden, a treasured Island landmark, a designated historical landscape, and an important educational and scientific resource. We have been recognized locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally as a plant science organization devoted to education, plant conservation, and the preservation of our historic landscape and buildings. Since our establishment in 1998, we've followed a philosophy of steady, sustaining growth. Today our 72-acre campus contains nine buildings and we employ eight full-time staff, three part-time staff, and three seasonal interns.

From our beginning, it has been challenging to find affordable housing for staff due to the high cost of living on Martha's Vineyard. But in 2022, the Covid-19 pandemic, along with other factors, has turned what was once a challenge into a legitimate crisis. The severity of the situation makes it nearly impossible to attract, hire, and retain qualified personnel for our essential operations and it jeopardizes our ability to accomplish our mission in the years ahead. Addressing the housing crisis is critical to our future as a successful institution.

Thoughtful Planning Leads to Proposed Solution

The PHA board and staff have met over the last three years to formulate a strategy to address the shortage of affordable housing on Martha's Vineyard and its impact on attracting and retaining qualified staff. One option brought to the table was the construction of employee housing on site; but a conservation restriction (CR) established in 1998 on sixty acres of our property by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) determines the kinds of development legally possible at PHA. However, in March 2020, a series of conversations with the DCR led to the development of a proposal to build staff housing within a 1.4-acre building envelope on our North Parcel, adjacent to the existing PHA Visitor Center and parking lot (Figure 1).

This Site is Advantageous for Many Reasons

- The location will not impact the PHA visitor experience, nor will the dwellings be visible from State Road.
- There is privacy and enough space to build up to three housing units.
- The proposed site uses the established State Road curb cut.
- An existing service road from the PHA parking lot through the woods will be utilized, which will reduce tree cutting.
- Proximity to existing utilities (near PHA's Visitor Center) will lower costs and cause less landscape disruption.
- A natural opening in the forest due to oak death caused by an insect outbreak will reduce the number of live trees removed from the site.
- The building site provides an opportunity to demonstrate native landscaping and reforestation using locally sourced plants.



Figure 1 Site of the 1.4-acre Building Envelope

Flexible Use Over Time

The dwellings are meant to be transitional housing and will fulfill multiple needs over a long period of time. We foresee them being used by several staff positions; possibilities include the following:

- Newly hired staff members moving to Martha's Vineyard
- Current staff members that have lost housing due to the housing crisis
- Curatorial, greenhouse, and summer horticulture interns

The initial project includes two 1,008 square foot single-family home dwellings (Figure 3). The size and layout can accommodate a range of tenants, including a single person, two individuals, a couple, or a young family. We may receive permission to build a third dwelling upon successful demonstration of meeting the DCR's guidelines and further need for staff housing. This third building could be the same footprint as the others, or different, depending on shifting needs. The provision of housing will be an attractive and necessary option for prospective staff and interns, and will help PHA retain qualified employees.

Inspired by Our Local Vernacular

The Island community admires PHA for its historically accurate building renovations as well as the appropriate new construction that has taken place over the last several years. A local team of architects and builders will be engaged in this project to harmonize the proposed buildings with the arboretum vernacular.



Figure 2 The new houses will harmonize with the Arboretum's historic buildings and landscape.



Figure 3 Building Envelope and Site Plan

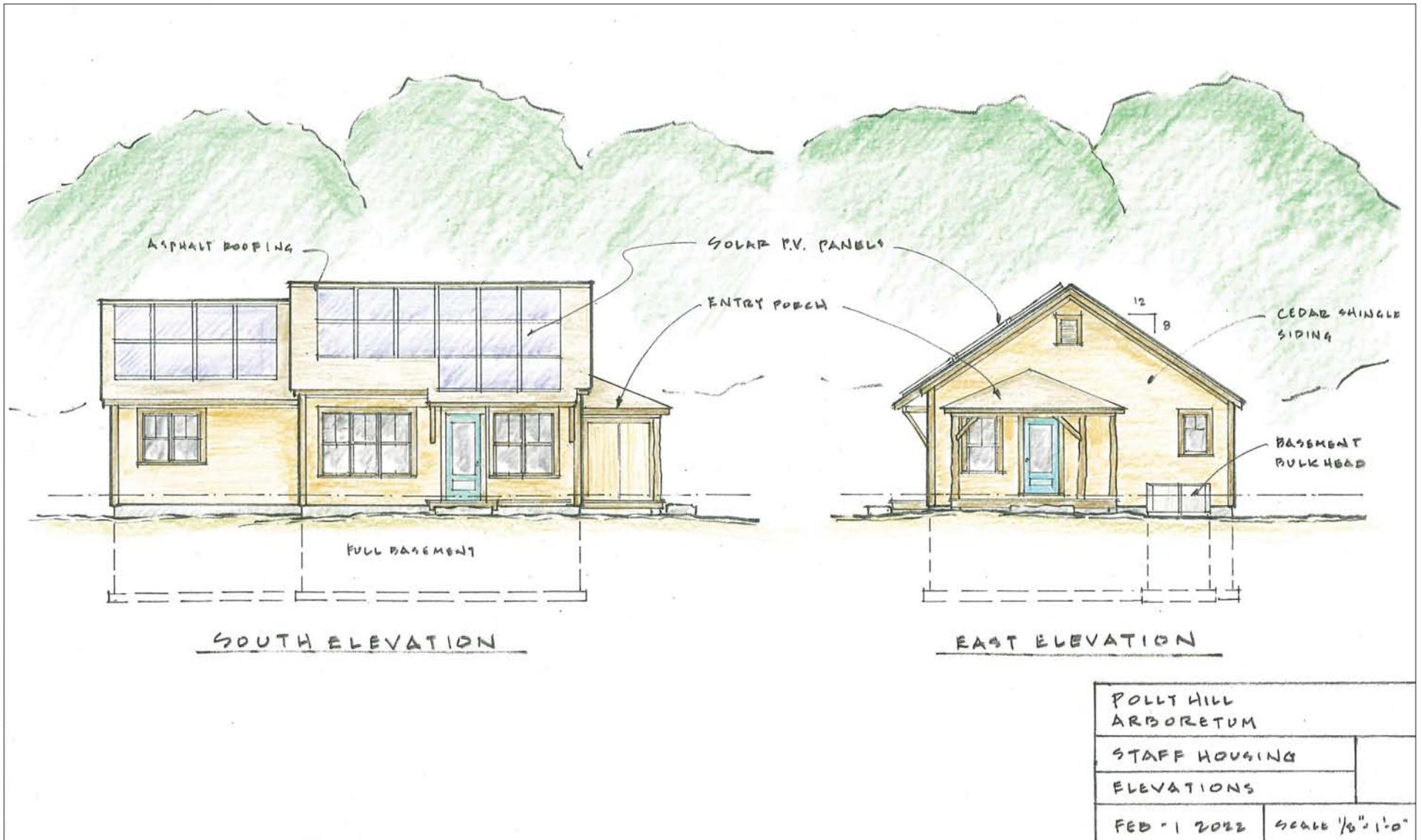


Figure 4 House Elevations

Sustainable Dwellings

The initial proposed dwellings are two independent 1,008 square foot single-family homes.

Design Aspects

- Their exterior design—cedar shingles, unpainted cedar trim, and green or grey-clad windows—will complement existing buildings at PHA as well as minimize ongoing maintenance costs.
- Their compact profile will be minimally visible from the public areas and the height will be much lower than the 30 ft. maximum the town allows.
- The homes will be tightly built and heavily insulated to reduce energy use.
- Heat will be provided by energy-efficient electric heat pumps. No on-site fossil fuels will be needed for cooking or heating.
- Each house will have two bedrooms, a shared bathroom, a kitchen, and a dining and sitting area.

- The houses are single floor for better accessibility and can be adapted to full accessibility as needed.
- Full basements will contain a laundry space, water heater, and other mechanical equipment and also provide additional unfinished space for occupant storage or activities.

Environmental Considerations

- An enhanced denitrification septic system will reduce nitrogen loading to our local watershed and act as a demonstration site for environmental infrastructure.
- Photovoltaic solar panels will be installed on the roofs to reduce energy consumption and operating costs.
- A shared electric vehicle charging station will be located at the parking area.
- Reforestation and landscaping will use locally grown native plants.
- Any suitable trees removed will be milled and used for construction components such as porch roof framing.

Help Us Secure Our Future!

In our brief history as a public garden, PHA has been admired for our beautiful landscape, unique plant collections, and quality educational programming. The gift that Polly Hill's arboretum bestows upon the Martha's Vineyard community comes with the responsibility to continue as exceptional stewards. As we look to the future, we recognize that PHA could have an even greater impact as a community resource, but only if we can continue to hire and retain dedicated and talented staff.

After years of thoughtful consideration and strategic planning towards solving our housing challenges, we now have the permission—and a plan!—to build staff housing on campus. We need your support to meet this challenge and bring stability to our staffing in the years ahead.

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A plant science organization devoted to education, plant conservation, and the care and preservation of our historic landscape and buildings.

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MAILING ADDRESS

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FIND US ONLINE

pollyhillarboretum.org
instagram.com/pollyhillarboretum
facebook.com/pollyhillarboretum
twitter.com/pollyhillarb
youtube.com, search: *polly hill arboretum*

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

The Homestead
809 State Road
West Tisbury, MA 02575

VISITOR CENTER/ VISITOR ENTRANCE

795 State Road
West Tisbury, MA 02575

ACCESSIBILITY

The Visitor Center is wheelchair accessible.

VISITOR CENTER HOURS

Open 9:30 am–4 pm daily, mid-May through mid-October

ARBORETUM GROUNDS HOURS

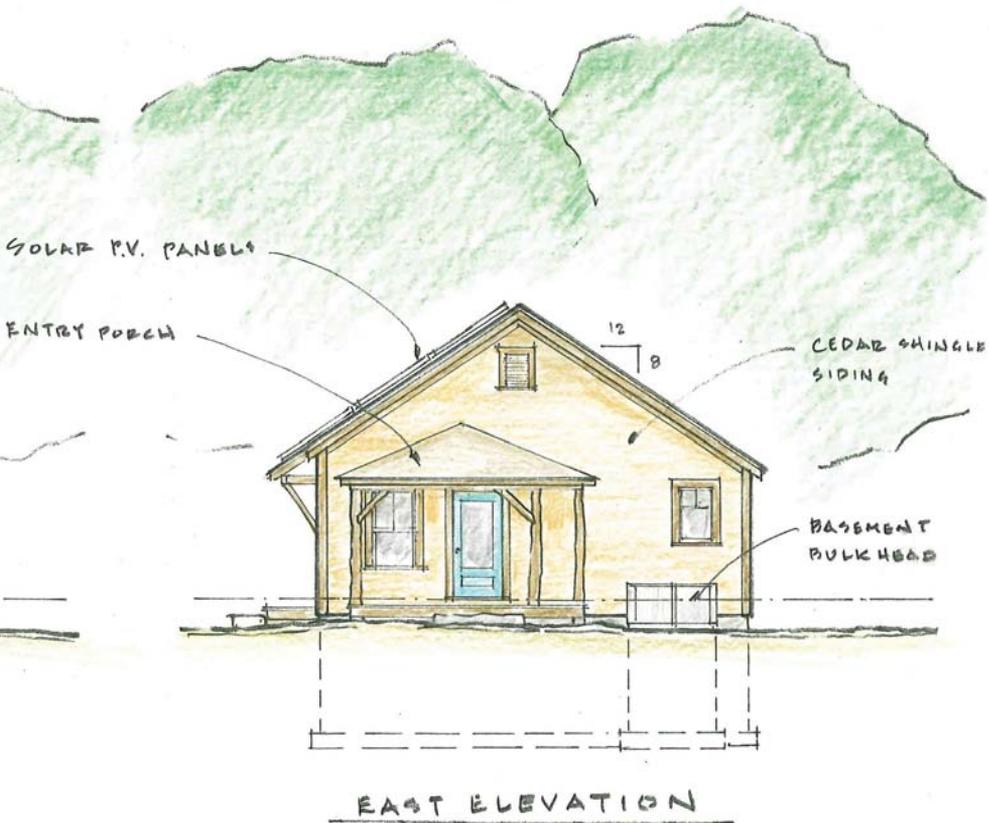
Sunrise–sunset, year-round
Please note: maintenance is often performed on Wednesdays.
Check website before visiting for occasional grounds closures.

ADMISSION

\$5
Free to members and children 12 and under

FREE PARKING

For more information on the Staff Housing Initiative, visit:
pollyhillarboretum.org/about/staff-housing-initiative



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