

## Is Truro Town Leadership Practicing Doublespeak?

In George Orwell’s novel *1984*, the Ministry of Truth is a deliberate exercise of doublethink. Doublethink is the ability to hold two contradictory ideas in one’s mind, believing and disbelieving them at the same time. Examples of doublethink are Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength, and  $2+2=5$ . Doublespeak is a language power technique that involves manipulating words so that what you say means something other than the sum of the definitions of those words.

From our Town Manager at the Select Board Meeting on Mar 19, 2024 we heard “How do we fund this position without any impact to the Taxpayers or Tax bill “(the Position being referenced the Housing Coordinator) is a good example of doublespeak.

### Background Information

First the Housing Coordinator was presented during the 2023 ATM in Article 13. The article had a Proposition 2½ override question. That meant that the Article needed approval at the ballot for funding. The Article passed at Town Meeting but failed at the ballot for funding. As such, the Article failed and could not be acted upon. It could come back has a new Article for FY 2025.

In the FY2025 warrant Article 1, you will find the Operating Budget. The Article begins with the words, “To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate and transfer from available funds...”. As the FinCom chair states, the operating budget is put together with the intent to meet the essential needs of the community. The operating budget for \$26,465,353 would be funded as follows:

<b>Source</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Raise through taxation	\$25,725,270.00
Transfer from Beach Receipts Reserved for Appropriation	\$433,000.00
Transfer from Pamet Harbor Receipts Reserved for Appropriation	\$85,500.00
Transfer from Recreation Receipts Reserved for Appropriation	\$13,500.00
Transfer from Conservation Commission Receipts Reserved for Appropriation	\$5,000.00
Transfer from Educational/Governmental Programming Access Fund	\$118,083.00
Transfer from Ambulance Receipts Reserved for Appropriation	\$85,000.00

Under the Total Government section of the budget, you will find the town Planner budget. The Salary line for the Town Planner is \$233,750. That amount includes \$85,000 for the Housing Coordinator position. Under the Clerks' Expense line, you will find \$90,000 for Harmari Software and Service.

## Doublespeak in Action

On March 19, 2024, the Town Manager explained the logic on how to fund/hire this position. He stated how "New Revenue" from the Rental Registration Fee would be used to fund this position without impacting the Taxpayer. The proposal was unanimously approved by the Select Board. Because the position presumably did not require a raise and appropriate, the Select Board could make this decision. The position was passed, and it was agreed that it would NOT be hired until June/July.

As I stated previously, the cost of the position is in the operating budget for FY2025.

For me, Doublespeak is as follows:

1. this position will be funded by Revenue collected by the increase in Fees – True
2. Hiring this position will have no impact on the Taxpayers – there will be no Tax increase - True

Both statements are True. But the combined statements are NOT True. The Taxpayer is impacted. The Town's Revenue is being decreased by \$175,000 because it will be used for the new position. That decrease in Revenue will increase the amount needed to be raised via taxation. This is like saying that buying goods using a Credit Card has no impact on the amount of cash you spend on purchasing goods. It's a ridiculous statement.

For me this is a classic Doublespeak. The intention of Doublespeak is to hide actions. The Select Board decided to fund this position using the Fees collected from the Rental Registration Fees. Using receipts/fees to pay for this will reduce Total Receipts by that amount. This reduction in Total Receipts will diminish the amount that can be used to pay for the operating budget. This will impact the Taxpayer as we then need to raise more money through taxation. We have entered the 1984 domain.

## Can Short Term Rental Fee be used for this position?

The Town Manager and Select Board used the following to justify the use of the Short-Term Rental Fees.

*Truro Bylaw 2-1-6: The funds generated by the rental registration fees shall be available generally to defray the costs of registration record keeping, the*

administration of the beach program, the maintenance and improvement of Town beaches and parking lots, the installation of signs, the furnishing of sanitary facilities, the provision of facilities for the physically handicapped, and the supply and operation of associated amenities.

*Truro Charter 5-5-4: The Town Manager may, with the approval of the Select Board, establish, reorganize, consolidate, or abolish any positions which are subject to the direction and supervision of the Town Manager, except as otherwise provided by General Law or By-law. The creation of any new position under this section shall not become effective until the position has been funded by Town Meeting.*

The Select Board has the power and authorization to Fund the Short-Term Rental Administration and Record Keeping position using the Revenue from the Short-Term Rental Registration bylaw 2-1-6.

Consider the Job description that was published on March 19, 2024:

Truro Housing Coordinator Time to Task Analysis				
Task	Task Description	Duration of Tasks Months	Hours	Note
1	Coordinates the Town's administrative, contractual, and technological resources to manage the administrative requirements for the Town's short-term rental registration process and compliance.	February -October	10	off-season tasks
2	Coordinates the development of the business plan and property management approach for the Town's workforce housing inventory.	year round	2	
3	Administers town-supported housing assistance programs, including Rental Assistance Program and CDBG Housing Rehabilitation.	year round	2	
4	Monitors and enforces compliance deed restrictions and regulatory requirements to ensure preservation of existing affordable housing units.	year round	2	
5	Monitors and enforces compliance with rental requirements for ADU and Duplex properties; monitors resale of affordable units.	year round	2	
6	Identifies and pursues and grant opportunities and public-private partnerships to amplify housing opportunity and production.	year round	6	
7	Coordinates Town's implementation of strategies in Housing Production Plan (HPP).	year round	8	
8	With Town Administration, develops requests for proposals (RFPs) and other project documents for Town-initiated housing projects. Coordinates regulatory review of projects by local, regional and state authorities, and manages technical assistance	year round	4	
9	Provides outreach to the community about housing programs and opportunities. Develops and executes housing-related public educational programs and events.	year round	4	
10				
		<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>48</b>	

Clearly Task #1 falls under the category of Registration and Record Keeping. This represents 25% of the job tasks. The remaining tasks have nothing to do with the administrative cost of Short-Term Rental Registration (I fully recognize that there is a debate on how Short-Term Rental could impact Year-Round Housing Affordability. The results of this debate do NOT impact Registration and Record Keeping). As such, they should not be

paid by Rental Registration Fees. Also, these administrative tasks are covered and paid for in the Service Contract with Harmari that is under the Clerks' Budget. Harmari is doing the Online Permitting and Record Keeping. That is the \$90,000 service contract the company will be hired to do the Rental Registration and Checking process (see town website: <https://www.truro-ma.gov/licensing-department/webforms/seasonal-rental-permit>).

I am asking that the new Select Board investigate this misuse of the Short-Term Rental Fees. Bylaw 2-1-6 clearly states and limits the use of the Short-Term Rental Fee. Tasks #2 to Task #9 are not in the domain of Registration and Record Keeping for Short Term Rental. Task #1 is being outsourced to Harmari and funded by the Clerk's expense budget. The position should not be posted and hired as it is a violation of Truro Bylaw 2-1-6.

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