

When Outdated Numbers Become “Facts”

- Why Truro Must Ground Its Housing Decisions in Real Data

Dear Editor,

March 31, 2026

In Truro, housing discussions often hinge on numbers—numbers that sound authoritative, urgent, and compelling. But in recent months, several of those numbers have turned out to be outdated, duplicative, or unrelated to the projects being discussed. These were not intentional misrepresentations. They were the predictable result of relying on regional or multi-town data when what we truly need is project-specific information.

Two recent examples—one involving Lawrence Hill in Wellfleet, and another involving Cloverleaf in Truro—show how easily misleading information can circulate as fact.

At the March 9, 2026 meeting of Truro’s Walsh Committee, as a barometer for local housing needs it was stated that Lawrence Hill had a five-year waiting list. That claim was misleading but understandable, because multi-year waits do happen on the Cape-wide Housing Assistance Corporation list. Yet, Lawrence Hill does not have a five-year waitlist, and the HAC regional list is not the Lawrence Hill applicant pool. Verified numbers from the Community Development Partnership’s February report showed 307 applicants, only 47 of whom were Wellfleet residents or Wellfleet-qualified. Lawrence Hill has 46 affordable units, with 32 earmarked for local preference.

A similar issue arose at the September 3, 2025 meeting of the Truro Housing Authority. A member expressed concern about whether Cloverleaf could be filled with local preference in time for occupancy. To waive off that concern, the Chair held up a document purported to contain thousands on a “waitlist” and exclaimed “Have you seen this?”

But the document was not a Cloverleaf waitlist. It had been compiled months earlier by a member of the Walsh Committee, and its limitations were openly acknowledged at the time by a member of the Walsh Committee who assembled it. It combined data from The Community Builders, Community Housing Resource, and the Community Development Partnership—195 units in total—and listed 3,269 people across those properties without specifying the recency of interest, status or location of names on the list.

The person who assembled it explained quite honestly that the numbers were duplicative, that households were likely on more than one list, that some may have already been housed elsewhere, and that the data was outdated. When later asked whether the list contained any information about where these applicants were from, she answered that there was no way to know; they were simply people who had indicated interest in housing in Truro or Provincetown. “They could be from anywhere...,” she said.

Despite this, the document was used by the now current Chair of the Truro Housing Authority to waive off concern about filling Cloverleaf with local preference. A long-time member and past Chair of the Truro Housing Authority then supported the conclusions of the housing professional by saying that Cloverleaf would “take a huge burden off” and address Truro’s critical housing need. If, as he suggested, 30 earmarked units (70% local preference allocation) will make a significant dent in meeting Truro’s housing needs, why is Truro racing ahead with major additional affordable housing projects? That number counters the alarm raised by inflated and inaccurate claims of waiting times and lists.

This exchange shows how easily non-project-specific information can shape conclusions — even among experienced advocates. It is entirely possible that officials citing these lists simply do not know that what they are invoking is misleading or inaccurate.

And this is the crux of the problem. **When Cloverleaf applications finally open—reportedly sometime this summer—we will, for the first time, have real, current, project-specific data.** That information will tell us far more than regional compilations ever could: how many households apply, how many qualify for local preference, where applicants are coming from, and what income bands and unit sizes are most needed.

Yet until that data exists, outdated and duplicative numbers continue to be circulated as proof of a sweeping housing crisis—used to build support for large-scale projects and the significant infrastructure and taxpayer costs that accompany them.

This is not about criticizing individuals. It is about recognizing that Truro is making decisions with long-term consequences for taxpayers, the environment, and the character of the town. We have time to gather real information. We should use it.

Truro, and every Outer Cape town, has an opportunity to take a responsible approach: **pause to learn; use what we learn to plan; then proceed with future projects informed by this knowledge.** That is how we ensure that our decisions are grounded in reality, fiscally responsible, environmentally sound, and aligned with the needs of the people who live here.

Thanks for your consideration.

Linda Aguilar, Truro