

## **To the editor:**

A current majority on the Truro Select Board is on a tear to add hundreds of units of subsidized multi-family housing to Truro if voters will approve. To that end, it proposes warrants at the upcoming town meeting on May 4 (i) to take the Truro Motor Inn by eminent domain and build an unknown number of units; (ii) to build two hundred fifty (250) units on the property recently purchased from the Walsh family; (iii) to build a new DPW facility next to the public safety building, thereby freeing up the land used by the existing facility near Town Hall for perhaps dozens of more units; (iv) and to purchase almost 24 acres, or a little less than half, of the Noons sand pit parcels.

The Select Board has changed its statements about the purpose of the sand pit purchase, but our state senator has told me that the purpose is to build a wastewater treatment facility that would support construction of a larger amount of multifamily housing in a broader section of town, even beyond the properties just mentioned. (Consistently, the Select Board currently describes a purpose of the purchase as unspecified “infrastructure.”) If voters approve, these actions would dramatically change the character of Truro, perhaps increasing the year-round population by at least a third or more, depending on the extent of additional construction after the wastewater facility goes online.

As an attorney of over thirty years who has been active in the public development process and lived for decades within a stone’s throw of multiple affordable housing projects, I believe that there have been a number of statements to induce support for these warrant that are either incorrect or incomplete in ways that may be material to voters.

1. Some contend a plan to supply “workforce” housing. But in fact, there is no requirement that anyone who gets a subsidized unit actually has to work. The requirement is only a certain measure of relative poverty. The rent can be paid from any number of public benefit programs, such as disability and unemployment, with additional family support from food stamps (SNAP) and other programs. This point is particularly acute since, on the state and federal level, work requirements from the 1996 Clinton welfare reforms are being reduced or eliminated. The experience in Boston has been that many of the units are occupied by people who do not work.

2. Some contend that the units will help families “stay in Truro.” In fact, under current state regulation, at least 30% must be offered to poor families around the state. For example, I understand that the affordable housing in Eastham has families that have moved from New Bedford. Boston bureaucrats (not local politicians) can change those regulations at any time to require greater numbers, and they probably will as they search for migrant housing and the like. In addition, even under the current regulations, the state requires offering a greater percentage to residents of other towns if the town has fewer minorities than the

statistical area (here Barnstable County) in which it is located. Some towns have had to limit their local preference to 25% due to racial disparities. Furthermore, the state requires several racial and other preferences that, whether you agree with them or not, are less likely to favor existing town residents. We should expect that the initial local preference might be for a quarter to half of whatever is built.

3. While there may be temporary construction jobs and money flows to the developers who build the subsidized projects, there is no evidence that subsidized housing creates long-term jobs for those who occupy them. On the Outer Cape, the fishing industry is not coming back and there are no other plausible candidates for substitute commercial activity other than continuation of seasonal tourism. That business needs dormitories for seasonal workers, not year-round housing for people who can work at most 3-4 months.

4. The near-term expense is substantial. The new DPW facility is estimated at \$35 million (and over \$60 million with interest, which will likely be even greater as inflation has failed to subside and the Fed is not lowering rates, contrary to the town manager's prediction). The sand pit purchase is over \$6 million, several times the current assessed value, and the cost of the Truro Motor Inn is unknown. While the Select Board has cited the current assessed value, the owners are allowed to sue for more, and – as with the sand pit – may contend that the actual market value is several times the assessed value for taxes. On top of this is the longer-term but likely much larger expense of increased schooling, police, fire and social services for a lower income population that will make little contribution to the real estate tax base. Second-home owners are not an infinite source of taxes, and have the option to relocate to Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, or simply other towns on the Cape.

5. Some politicians may sincerely believe that it is the obligation of Truro taxpayers to take on these expenses to house a population from other parts of the state. Some may also benefit from the very substantial political donations for which affordable housing developers are notorious, or prefer the dramatic change in the composition of the electorate that would follow, or have an interest in building contractors for the projects. But it is a mistake to judge a proposal by the good or bad motives of its supporters or opponents. Whatever their motives may be, the Select Board majority, in my opinion, has made several proposals that would dramatically change the rural quality of life in Truro for the worse, in a financially unsustainable way.

John A. Shope  
Truro