

## Town's Financial Fumbles and Voter Betrayal: It's Time We Took Back Control

Dear Editor:

Something rotten is brewing in Truro. The erosion of voter rights in Truro is not a sudden event, but a slow, insidious process. We are lulled into a false sense of security with assurance of transparency and voter-led decisions, while behind the scenes, our ability to direct tax dollars is systematically diminished. This subtle but persistent pattern threatens to disenfranchise us all.

### Affordable Housing Coordinator

During last year's short-term rental fee hike by the Select Board, we were told (Select Board meeting 3/19,2024 Agenda 5A) *"The Town Manager and Finance Director have determined the Town now has sufficient funding through the rental registration fees (General bylaw 2-1-6) to defray the costs of rental registration record keeping and through additional occupancy tax receipts to adequately fund the housing coordinator position. Implementing this position is now possible without raising taxes through a raise and appropriate override article or free cash transfer."* We were told that Revenue would fund a Housing Coordinator position, a position voters explicitly rejected at the ballot. The \$119,077 collected in 2024 is nowhere near the \$184,000 (\$99,000 for Rental Registration Compliance fee and \$85,000 for salary of the Housing Coordinator). We were blatantly misled.

In 2025, the town also added a Climate Coordinator, initially funded by \$59,000 from Free Cash. Future funding, purportedly from a solar contract with Brewster, masks the underlying issue: we're buying more solar credits than we can currently use. The plan is to sell the excess solar credits, at a loss to fund this position. This creates a misleading impression of 'revenue' when, in reality, it's a taxpayer-funded expenditure disguised as a self-sustaining program.

In the FY2026 budget, we will hire a Human Resource Manager. This resource will fit under the current budget expenditure level.

I'm not debating the need for these positions, but the consistent circumvention of voter approval is deeply troubling. The Housing Coordinator and Human Resource Manager were explicitly rejected by voters. The Climate Coordinator, despite its 'revenue-neutral' presentation, relies on taxpayer funds. This pattern, coupled with the claim of 'no taxpayer impact,' reveals a fundamental budget problem. If we can add three positions without increasing tax-payer funding or cutting services, our budget is not lean. There is no other plausible explanation. **These budget surpluses must be returned to taxpayers, not used to bypass their decisions.**

### Future Efforts to Bypass Voter Approval

We've been repeatedly assured: 'Nothing will be built without voter approval.' This promise echoed during the Affordable Housing Building plan approval and the Walsh purchase funding. Yet, the proposed Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (MAHT) and the Walsh Overlay Zone directly contradict this pledge. These initiatives shift crucial decisions to unelected boards, effectively bypassing voter consent. We must ask: are we willing to accept this erosion of our promised rights?

## **The Affordable Housing Deception:**

Don't get me wrong, affordable housing is vital. As a community we have met the challenges to support this goal. The Voters have funded over \$7 million in land : Cloverleaf, Walsh and Truro Motor Inn. The town has also effectively utilized Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds, allocating a minimum of 60% to affordable housing, resulting in \$585,648 in FY25.

Additionally, 33% of Room Occupancy Tax generated \$650,000 in FY25. Public records indicate that as of March 1, 2025, the Affordable Housing Stabilization Fund held \$753,263 and the Affordable Housing Trust held \$2,808,520, with an outstanding \$1.6 million commitment for Cloverleaf Development. Based on current revenue streams and the \$37K/unit (town contribution per unit at Cloverleaf), the town could potentially fund over 200 new units within five years.

The proposed MAHT is a blatant power grab. It systematically strips voters of their current right to influence affordable housing decisions. Unelected trustees will be granted unchecked authority to buy, sell, mortgage property, and hire consultants, while the town—and its taxpayers—bear the full burden of cost and liabilities. Our proven system, which has successfully secured land and millions for affordable housing, is being discarded for a model that deliberately excludes voter input. This isn't about progress; it's about control and the complete elimination of the speed-bump – the Voter.

## **Walsh: The Ultimate Land Grab:**

In this year's warrant, the voters will be asked to approve a Zoning overlay for this area. The proposed bylaw amendment would establish an overlay district covering all of the Walsh Property, with three subdistricts: Medium Density, Low Density, and Recreational. The proposed overlay would allow 5-story buildings in the medium density district. The goal of the overlay is (from the Zoning Task Force FAQ) to increase density: *"The dimensional requirements would significantly limit the number of dwelling units that can be located on the Walsh Property under current zoning regulations."* . We are allowing developers to increase Density in a Water Protection Overlay District.

The proposed zoning overlay will increase density in this fragile undeveloped area. If we approve it, the stage is set for high density full development 160+ units on Walsh. Once that's in place, developers will have free rein. We'll have no say in what gets built on Walsh. They're taking away our vote, plain and simple. Do we want to hand over our town's future to developers who have no stake in our community? Who will fight to protect clean water? It wasn't in the scope of the Zoning Task Force. Their charge was to increase density on Walsh. No surprise that we have a 5-story building proposal.

## **MAHT and Walsh Zoning Overlay**

These two proposals—the Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (MAHT) and the Walsh Overlay Zone—effectively sever voter control over future funding and land decisions. We'll be left without a voice in what gets built, potentially including high-density structures like five-story buildings. Decisions on MAHT staffing will also be removed from voter purview. This begs the question: why should we support this? We shouldn't. We must act now to protect our future.

Voters, we've been complacent for too long and have allowed our rights to be eroded. We've seen our rights chipped away, one warrant article at a time. It's time to demand accountability. It's time to demand transparency. It's time to reclaim our town. We need to reject these proposals, not just for ourselves, but for future generations.

This is our town, and we expect our elected officials to follow our directives and votes – and to remember that we, the voters, remain the deciders of our fiscal future.

-Michael Forgione