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The Inquirer and Mirror, Nantucket, Mass.

# Letterbag

## Clarifying need, misconceptions on affordable housing at 6 Fairgrounds

To the Editor,

We thank *The Inquirer and Mirror* for its editorial last week in support of the town's housing development at its Fairgrounds Road property and we further appreciate the invitation to address some of the points asserted in last week's Letter to the Editor authored by Mr. Matt Reinemo.

There is some common ground: Mr. Reinemo acknowledges the definite lack of supply of housing for our year-round community. The Workforce Housing Needs Assessment (2015) documented, "most of Nantucket's unaffordably housed renters are working-age people." Indeed, a survey done of town departments, Chamber of Commerce members and nonprofits in 2016 reflected that only 51 percent of respondents' employees had housing that is sufficiently affordable and stable to meet their needs. The significant demand and short supply are further borne out in Richmond Development Group's indication it has received in excess of 500 expressions of local interest for the 225 rental units they will be building.

The impetus for community/workforce housing goes beyond the basic shortage of supply. If the town wants to have adequate defense against "unfriendly" 40Bs, like 106 Surfside Road, it needs to reach the 10 percent affordable requirement the

state imposes on year-round housing stock. We are presently at 2.5 percent toward that goal. If one could wave a magic wand and both Richmond and Ticcoma Green were built as advertised tomorrow morning, the town would still be approximately 50 units short of its state-mandated requirement. Mr. Reinemo goes on incorrectly to assert that the 6 Fairgrounds Road / Ticcoma Green development is being "fast-tracked behind closed doors."

It may be useful to outline the extensive and robust public record regarding this project. Mr. Reinemo did have it correct: the history of the town's intent and desire to use a portion of the land at Fairgrounds Road (the former electric company property) for housing does date back over a decade to when the town acquired the property in 2004/2005 and that housing on the site was a stated purpose at the time. However, Mr. Reinemo's implication that that was the only time the town has had a public discussion or vote regarding using this land to develop housing for our year-round community is simply false.

The town voted unanimously with respect to this property at the 2015 Annual Town Meeting to support Article 99, specifically giving the Board of Selectmen authority "to use or convey, lease or otherwise dispose of all or any portions of the property for affordable housing purposes or municipal sponsored housing of any kind."

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10/26/17  
1 of 2

Further, multiple Town Meetings across 2009, 2014, 2015 and 2016 also authorized related zoning changes, all geared toward using the Fairgrounds Road property for the stated purpose of housing, in accordance with the will of the community. A primary strategy of the town's 2016 certified Housing Production Plan (HPP) is to develop housing on the Fairgrounds Road property.

The Board of Selectmen, town administration and the Planning Department set about developing an RFP for 64 rental apartments and appropriately reviewing bona fide responses. These processes took place over the course of approximately a year and half and were agenda items at numerous public Board of Selectmen and other meetings between 2015 and 2017.

This all is, of course, not even factoring in the multiple articles over the past two years that have appeared in this paper relating to the town's Fairgrounds Road housing development.

Occupying "a real corner of the world, away off shore," as Herman Melville once put it, there has been a long history of the year-round community looking out for one another. What Mr. Reinemo's letter sadly illustrates is that NIMBY - Not In My Back Yard - is apparently alive on Nantucket.

Specific and genuine project concerns should be brought forward, as has been encouraged throughout this process. These are appropriately addressed through the public processes at the Planning Board and Historic District Commission.

There will be a public forum held Monday, Oct. 30 at 5:30 p.m. in the Community Room at 4 Fairgrounds Road which will further address the history and facts of the project. We encourage anyone interested in learning more to attend.

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10/20/17

2 of 2