

Up-Island Council on Aging (UICOA)

DATE: July 21, 2026

TO: Select Boards – Aquinnah, Chilmark, West Tisbury

FROM: Bethany Hammond, Director UICOA and UICOA Board

RE: **Howes House – Elevator and related impacts**

Dear Select Board Members,

*Below is a summary of a recent development at Howes House (HH). The **objective** of this letter is to communicate the facility's current limitations, solicit input from Select Board members on their thoughts, concerns, and potential solutions and to help the UICOA create a near-term and/or longer-term road map. Formation of a building committee, with representatives from each town, is likely required to evaluate practical and economically feasible options.*

Associated Elevator Company performed routine service on the Howes House (HH) elevator on May 20, 2026. The technician indicated the elevator is near functional obsolescence, exacerbated by lack of parts. The elevator was installed at HH in 1996 for the purpose of moving UICOA clients to/from the basement for group activities. Today, the elevator is only used to move medical equipment to/from the 2nd floor; the elevator is no longer safe for passenger use. Furthermore, the elevator periodically gets stuck between floors. The technician estimates the elevator will have to be decommissioned in less than 2 years. In our opinion, the elevator should not be used as continued operation increases liability risk for the Town of West Tisbury.

Our options are quite limited to remediate the current situation. More specifically:

- Installing a new elevator would cost more than \$95K and would require enlarging the current elevator shaft; the combined costs would meet the threshold for a Building Code review,
- Medical equipment currently stored on the 2nd floor will need to be relocated to another town facility or external storage container,
- We are evaluating a motorized 'stair chair' for accessing the basement (very preliminary stage).

As you are all aware, the UICOA has near term plans to make modest adjustments to the interior of the HH to improve accessibility (these costs covered by WT warrant article passed this year, and kitchen upgrades to meet commercial kitchen requirements (costs covered by an MCOA grant). Longer term however, the weathervane is pointing to a potential new UICOA facility as our client base and corresponding demand for services grow.

On behalf of the UICOA Board members and my team, I look forward to beginning discussions on the future facility to support the UICOA.