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To the West Tisbury Select Board:

I am writing this letter out of concern for the clarity and direction of the public discourse surrounding the Howes House project.

West Tisbury can be proud of its history of municipal construction in recent decades, including the Town Hall, the Library expansion, the Public Safety Building and the Police Station. All of these buildings took years to design and were honed through rigorous public scrutiny and discussion. The results were town facilities that are well-designed, well-executed, and well-suited to their missions.

The Howes House project seems to be speeding down a different road, and I worry that some important steps may have been skipped.

This project originated with an assessment a year ago that identified areas in which the Howes House needed maintenance, renovation and repairs to bring it into compliance with building and access codes. There was no question that these clearly defined issues could be best solved through construction, and a building and renovation committee was duly appointed.

However, for reasons that are not as clearly defined, the building committee then set about not only to renovate the Howes House but to expand it dramatically. The underlying assumption appears to have been that the Up-Island Council on Aging cannot properly serve seniors because of inadequate space at the Howes House. When pressed to document this notion, the building committee commissioned a focus group study among residents age 55 and older that has become the basis of the preliminary designs to date.

The focus group feedback indicated a desire (if not an actual need) for additional programming. This points to an important question that the building committee does not seem to have seriously considered: Is new construction the only way to provide the activities and programs that the focus group outlined? This omission is understandable because it is not really

a building committee's mandate to imagine solutions that do not involve construction. That mandate belongs to the Select Board.

I'm writing with this request: May we please press the "pause" button in order to conduct a broader community conversation that involves other age groups, other town departments, other areas of expertise? Before presenting a vastly enlarged architectural design as if it were inevitable, may we please look at other avenues for serving the needs of seniors?

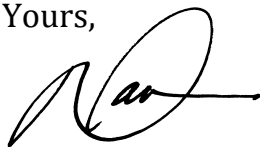
For example, it might be advantageous to show the focus group results to the West Tisbury Library director and board of trustees. Ask them: which of these requests are duplications of services that the library already offers? Would an expanded schedule of library open hours (perhaps evenings or mornings) be enough to accommodate some of the programs on the focus group's wish list? How else might the library work with the Council on Aging to share physical space? It may take weeks or months for the library to respond with a proposal, but this could be time well spent. If history is any guide, the library may come back with some creative recommendations that make the Howes House renovation an even more effective project.

One idea that emerged from the focus group was exactly what I am describing: a model whereby the Howes House might serve as part of a multi-generation-use campus that includes the library. This kind of integrated campus demands precisely the kind of cross-departmental collaboration that I'm proposing — not only during the design process, but on an ongoing basis, every day, for the foreseeable future. If collaboration is going to work, now is the time to test it.

Once the list of perceived needs has been pared down through consolidation, that might be the time to re-engage the design process. At that point, the project should feel a lot more like its predecessors, which were ultimately embraced by voters when the time came to approve funding.

Thank you for continuing to view West Tisbury as an interactive and evolving community with a long tradition of transparency and open discourse.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Waters". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dan Waters