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Selectboard
Town of West Tisbury

RE: Howes House Project

I am writing today to express my strong opinion that you face difficult decisions regarding the future of the current Howes House project.

So far, this is not a failure, it is how governmental problems get solved. A project was proposed and investigated. It moves forward if it will work AND IF there is citizen support.

The investigation of renovating the Howes House has revealed that the building committee's vision of what is required for the COA is not a suitable fit in this location. So, the Howes House project has met with serious opposition. It is a waste of time to scapegoat the Historic District Commission. They are doing exactly the job that, BY STATUTE, they are REQUIRED to do. As proposed, the structure is not suitable for this prominent location in the town's historic center.

How to move forward?

- a. acquire another piece of land;
- b. find another location, and/or
- c. replace the Howes House roof and allow time to evaluate options for the building using a transparent process that has some chance of success.

What contributed to our current conundrum? The PROCESS so far is the failure, not the Historic District Commission. Key stakeholders were not included from the beginning--library trustees, the two other towns, etc. There was no space needs study. There is no vision or articulation of what programming will be enhanced or improved and for what age groups. It's up to the Town to inform the architects what the project is, not the other-way-around. Not all the COA staff think an expansion is necessary. Debt financing seems to be a driving force for the project.

Critical comments and suggestions were both ignored and dismissed. Critics are viewed as malcontents and the "usual troublemakers". Just because the building committee doesn't like the opposition, does NOT make it wrong.

Town officials have not been listening. Responses such as, "So many people have worked so hard on this project." Or, "Our seniors deserve the best." Or, "What will we do with the building?" Or, "The Town doesn't own another piece of land." Or, "There hasn't been any opposition." all fail to address legitimate concerns.

AGAIN, extremely important, do NOT make the mistake of blaming the Historic District Commission. They are doing their job! Chilmark and Aquinnah are being polite, saying, "We will leave the decision up to our voters." I have been on the Chilmark Zoom calls. Translation: "no funds forthcoming." There's a very good chance that there is no WT voter appetite for a \$10+ million project (on top of so many other pressing financial

demands) and certainly not for one that will so drastically and inappropriately alter the historic center of town FOREVER.

Susan Wasserman