

Annual Town Meeting - May 2022
Article 16 - Fund Housing Assistance Corporation - 107 Main Street - Nay Votes
Tim Counihan, Finance Committee

The Finance Committee voted 1-5 against Article 16. I am speaking for the majority “no” vote.

First, I need to say that all of us are in favor of affordable housing. Average housing values continue to rise and short-term rentals have driven out the availability of year-round rental housing. Orleans has an entry level, workforce housing crisis.

This is precisely why we need to ensure that the Town reviews the financial implications of its housing investments and makes the best use of our money by minimizing the per unit cost of these projects. Housing is expensive.

We applaud the hard work that the Housing Trust and the Housing Committee have done on 107 Main Street. But conditions have changed since that project was started and our housing plans need to adapt.

107 Main Street suffers three major deficiencies when compared to projects like the Pennrose or the Governor Prence property: It is too small, it is not centrally located, and it is planned to be on a non-conforming septic system. Professional Housing Advocates would agree with that assessment.

First, 107 Main Street is not to scale. The size of a project drives the per unit subsidy that the Town needs to provide. The Town’s Pennrose subsidy is \$32,000 per unit for 62 units; 107 Main Street is already at \$134,000 each for 14 units. This Article would add an additional \$71,000 per unit. With over 5 sewered acres, a property like Governor Prence could provide the Town with 75 or more affordable housing units. Compare these two projects and think about which would be a more cost-effective use of taxpayer dollars.

Secondly, 107 Main Street is not located in the Town center. Smart planning would place affordable housing in the Town center, on a sewered site, with close access to transportation, shops, and grocery stores. Think about it.

Thirdly, 107 Main Street would put 20 bedrooms on a 1.25 acre unsewered site. This is 4 times the standard for a residential site. At a time when Orleans intends to spend well in excess of \$100M over the next several decades, removing nitrogen from our ground water, why on earth would the Town actively choose to install a large, non-conforming septic system in a residential neighborhood? Think about it.

The Finance Committee recommends that you vote no on Article 16 and that all funds from 107 Main Street be redirected towards larger, more cost-effective housing projects.

Thank you for your consideration.