



HOUSING NETWORK
OF RHODE ISLAND

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, December 6, 2024

Statement from Melina Lodge, Executive Director of the Housing Network of Rhode Island, on the Proposed George Waterman Road Housing Development in Johnston

PAWTUCKET, RI – The Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI) is dedicated to ensuring all Rhode Islanders have access to safe, affordable homes. With [60% of Johnston residents voting in favor of the \\$120 million housing bond this November](#), it's clear the majority support affordable homes. Despite vocal opposition from neighbors, the support for the bond shows most residents recognize the need for more inclusive housing. The homes proposed for George Waterman Road would be a vital step toward that goal.

The Low and Moderate Income Housing Act, in place since 1991, has long been a necessary tool to ensure municipalities contribute to solving our statewide housing crisis. Mayor Polisena's threat to challenge the constitutionality of the LMIH Act is concerning and misaligned to the actual housing needs of his constituents.

With only 7.9% of Johnston's homes qualifying as affordable according to HousingWorks RI's [2024 Fact Book](#), this project is not only needed but could help the town achieve the 10% affordability threshold required by the law. Embroiling the town in a potentially lengthy legal battle will waste taxpayer dollars and delay much needed progress.

We need our leaders to put people first. Affordable housing developments like the one proposed on George Waterman Road benefit the entire community by providing more housing options, boosting property values and fostering diverse, thriving neighborhoods. Studies repeatedly show that affordable housing does not negatively impact property values, nor does it lead to increased crime or safety concerns. These stereotypes are unfounded and damaging to the communities they seek to divide.

The opposition's concerns, such as increased traffic or drainage issues, are common in discussions around new development but are often misguided. Comprehensive planning and thoughtful infrastructure investment can address these concerns.

Furthermore, the suggestion that Johnston should prioritize single-family homes ignores the reality that the median home price in Johnston is \$399,900, requiring an income of \$136,361 to afford. Many Johnston families simply cannot meet this threshold, as 3,355 households in Johnston are already cost-burdened, and 4,580 households earn below

80% of the area median income (\$80,950 for a three-person household). Forty percent of households in Johnston qualify as low-income under HUD's guidelines.

The broader debate here reflects a growing movement against dense housing developments in many communities. But affordable, multifamily housing is a solution that Rhode Islanders have already shown they want, as evidenced by their overwhelming support for the \$120 million housing bond passed this November. We must debunk the myths around these projects and focus on the real, tangible benefits they bring. Johnston's future depends on creating homes for all its residents, not just those who can afford expensive single-family homes.

While the Housing Network of Rhode Island is not taking a formal position on this specific development proposal, we believe that 252 new affordable homes in Johnston would help the town meet its affordability goals and address the urgent need for more housing for local residents.

It's time for our leaders to focus on the facts and follow the will of their constituents. The majority of Johnston residents have shown that they support affordable housing, and the George Waterman Road proposal is a key part of making that vision a reality. Let's put the needs of the community first, and work together to create a future where all residents have access to the housing they need to thrive.

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The Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI) is a membership organization made up of 19 community development corporations and affordable housing developers. Together, our members are dedicated to building affordable housing and strengthening communities across the state.

HNRI members include: Church Community Housing Corporation, Crossroads Rhode Island, Foster Forward, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Providence and East Bay, House of Hope Community Development Corporation, Jonnycake Center, NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley, Omni Development Corporation, ONE Neighborhood Builders, Pawtucket Central Falls Development, Pawtucket Housing Authority, Providence Revolving Fund, Sojourner House, South County Habitat for Humanity, SWAP (Stop Wasting Abandoned Property) Inc., Valley Affordable Housing Corporation, WARM Center, West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation & Women's Development Corporation