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Dear members of the Commission,

I am writing in support of the Menotomy project. I have had occasion to visit the many restaurants at 14 Kennebec Ave. over the years. The Red Cat Kitchen, the current occupants of 8 years has brought a flair to the slowly deteriorating building, making it seem cozy and inviting. Well, it is inviting. The food is fantastic, the wait staff excellent, and the decor charming.

It may seem startling to think of the current building disappearing. We become fond of those places we've grown accustomed to. But that doesn't always translate into sound decision making. The Tisbury School is a case in point... it would be sad to see that old building gone. But wasn't it a mistake not voting in a new structure? Can they really make that old building safe enough to house our children? And at what cost? Or the old Oak Bluffs school, so quaint in those old buildings. But look what the Island got instead? A state-of-the-art school that is quite beautiful.

Obviously this project is on a totally different scale. One small building, in town, that houses the Red Cat Kitchen, with apartment space above replacing an aged rotting building. The new plans retain the feeling of the old structure, and are in keeping with the character of Oak Bluffs. And since it will be handicapped accessible, more people will be welcomed through the door.

The former owners had the building on the market for many years. And it has taken years for someone to want to take on the project. Because it is a project. The current structure is a mess. To actually have new owners who want to replace the building, yet keep a highly successful restaurant in place is commendable. But of course, this comes at a price, the high cost of Vineyard construction. To recoup the investment, by having rentable apartments on a second and third floors makes sense. It looks like a win-win to me. The restaurant stays, and there will be 4 units where people can actually live, an increase in rentable housing on the Island. I understand it won't be "affordable" housing, but housing nonetheless.

The housing discussion is an old one, although some of the details have changed. My relatives had property on Martha's Vineyard and I came here every summer as a child. When I moved here full time with my husband and 1 1/2-year-old daughter in 1982, I was aware of the Island shuffle. Year-round rentals were scarce. Island workers could find great bargains for the winter months, but come June they would have to move out finding unenviable housing for the summer months. So, I knew we should look to buy as soon as possible. All we could afford was a small piece of land in West Tisbury. We spent our first summer/fall in a tent until it threatened to collapse due to an unusually heavy rainstorm. We then moved into our shed and lived there for 4 years, expanding it bit by bit as we slowly built our 'permanent' house. That is what people did back then who wanted to make a life here.

Yet as the Island's reputation grew, so did the desire of the rich and famous... or just the rich... to want a piece of it, thereby causing land and housing prices to soar. There are so many mega-mansions... so uncharacteristic of the Island... where owners come for a few short weeks of the year. And the rest of us have been paying for it, because with the high price of land and housing we are asked to provide housing for the less fortunate, to pay into an affordable housing bank. It's actually those people in the middle that get left out, young professionals who make a decent living wage, yet still can't afford property.

I know four units at 14 Kennebec Ave. will not solve this problem, and they may not be low income rentals, but they provide a niche for the visitor, or the young professional. Worthy goals on an Island that depends on both.

Thank you,

Susan Safford

Volunteer at the MV Museum, Island Food Pantry,
and former production manager at The MV Times for 30 years