

# CAPE COD TIMES

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## NEWS

# 'Incredibly significant.' Cape housing agency adds Dennis parcel, focuses on youth in plan



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HYANNIS — Housing Assistance Corporation plans to use a former nursing home in South Dennis to house up to 79 families, merging three family shelters in Barnstable, Falmouth and Bourne.

The existing shelters will subsequently become studios and two-bedroom year-round rentals to add to the Cape's housing stock for individuals and families. Housing Assistance Corporation CEO Alisa Magnotta said the move represents "a reset" for the organization, which is marking its 50th anniversary this year.

"It's a consolidation of our shelters and then using the assets that we already own a little differently," said Magnotta during an interview Wednesday at the nonprofit's Hyannis headquarters on West Main Street.

The properties will also house a new Upper Cape satellite office for the housing nonprofit's outreach and intake teams and serve as a base for an existing mental health and homeless youth program.

Families currently being served at the three family shelters — Angel House in Hyannis, the Village at Cataumet in Bourne and Carriage House in North Falmouth — will move to 1 Love Lane in Dennis, which was South Dennis Healthcare before closing in mid-November.

According to the housing agency's shelter statistics, in 2022 the organization served more than 236 people including 138 children. An average stay ranged from nine to 12 months.

The nonprofit will file plans with the Dennis Planning Board for special review on Thursday under the town's zoning bylaws for its use of the property, Magnotta said. The organization

has the town building commissioner's approval for the state Dover Amendment, she said.

The Dover Amendment, originally adopted in 1950, mandates that proposed religious and educational land uses be given more favorable treatment than other proposed uses (such as residential, commercial or industrial) under local zoning ordinances and by-laws, according to the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association, an interlocal service of the Massachusetts Municipal Association.

Currently, the plan is to open the new facility in mid-2024.

## **Dennis nursing home sold in September**

One Love Lane South Dennis LLC sold the 128-bed nursing home to Housing Assistance Corporation for \$4.3 million, according to a deed recorded with the Barnstable County Registry of Deeds on Sept. 28.

Magnotta said the housing nonprofit was approached by the former property owner's broker in January 2023 to buy the site. She said the nursing home operator struggled amid a labor crunch exacerbated by the lack of affordable housing.

**In November:** 'Stressful and emotional': Dennis 128-bed nursing home closes. Housing agency new owner.

"The owner was seeing that it was likely to go into fiscal receivership. It was likely going to have to close abruptly and with drama around it," said Magnotta.

South Dennis Healthcare was operated by Woburn-based Next Step Healthcare, which has closed several facilities in recent years including one in Wareham in 2021 and one in Dedham in 2022.

As of Jan. 1, Housing Assistance Corporation officially has site control and can now speak publicly about the planned use, Magnotta said.

## **New shelter in Dennis**

The 57,000-square-foot building is in "tip-top shape," said Magnotta. Extensive work is not required, but the housing nonprofit plans to work with an architect and other consultants to renovate and redesign the site for its new use.

Once the Dennis shelter is complete, Magnotta said clients will be able to access many different services there, with plans including food programs, playgroups, tutoring, medical care and more. She's also eyeing the property's full-size professional kitchen for job training opportunities.

"The clients aren't just seeing us. They're not just living in our building. They're talking to WIC and other housing agencies and health care agencies," said Magnotta. "Having the clients go to a bunch of different locations and talk to a bunch of different providers is really hard for them and cumbersome and often delays the clients' progress."

Twenty-four-hour shelter staff and security will also be available, as well as education, case management and public transportation.

Magnotta said the plan is not meant to address the migrant housing crisis.

"That's not our mission. Our mission is about creating year-round housing and making sure that we are available with our resources for year-round Cape Codders and people who live on the Islands," said Magnotta.

## **Plans for permanent housing**

Meanwhile, the housing nonprofit's existing family shelters will be turned into permanent housing units.

Angel House in Hyannis will become nine two-bedroom apartments and the homeless youth program.

"A lot of the homeless system is set up for adults," said Cassi Danzl, the chief operating officer for Housing Assistance Corporation. "Having an 18-, 19-, 20-, 21-year-old go in there is a very intimidating experience ... this will allow us to not necessarily utilize those resources that are designed for adults and have a home specifically designed for youth."

The Village at Cataumet in Bourne will house 18 studios and the nonprofit's Upper Cape office. The Carriage House in North Falmouth will likely be rented out by another housing agency for a year-round program.

Magnotta said she hopes the new plan will help boost her staff's morale.

"We're turning families away from housing. The best tool we have is, 'Go stay living in your car,' because we have no place, we have no options. For us to open up these 18 studios and

nine two-bedrooms and the homeless youth we know are couch-surfing or worse, it's really incredibly significant for us," said Magnotta.

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