

JENNIFER R. RATLIFF

• ARCHIVIST •

With each passing week, my village of Hyannis looks less and less like the quintessential Cape Cod destination that millions of travelers come to see. The charming cottages, mid-century motels, and historic Victorian homes that once defined our community are disappearing, replaced by towering four-story high-rises and sprawling luxury mansions.

Now, yet another irreplaceable piece of our heritage is under threat: the home of Civil Rights activist Eugenia Fortes.

In 1945, while working in Hyannis Port, Fortes visited what was then known as East Beach off Iyannough Avenue. When ordered by a police officer to leave, she refused, taking a stand against the segregation and racism of the time. That same beach now proudly bears her name.

Fortes' legacy and impact extend far beyond that courageous act. She co-founded Cape Cod's chapter of the NAACP and served on the Hyannis Public Library Board of Directors for forty years. Her home at 23 Pleasant Hill Lane welcomed national figures, including future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

That same home, steeped in both local and national significance, is now threatened by a development that offers not the affordable housing needed, but yet another batch of unattainable luxury condominiums.

This is not the kind of progress Hyannis needs.

Our community deserves development that honors its character and employs adaptive reuse to preserve our architectural and cultural history. We should be encouraging thoughtful, contextual design that reflects the spirit of our Main Streets and neighborhoods, rather than replacing it with structures that render our village unrecognizable.

It doesn't have to be this way.

I urge our elected officials and committee members to demand better. Use every available tool, including demolition delays. Work with developers on projects that enhance and preserve, rather than erase, the soul of Hyannis. I also call on residents—my neighbors—to speak up and hold leaders and developers accountable to this standard.

Saving the Eugenia Fortes House is just the beginning.

In a time when many feel powerless, remember real change begins at the local level. Your voice can make a bold and lasting impact. Together, we can preserve the cultural heritage, history, and architectural identity of Hyannis for generations to come.

Respectfully,

Jennifer R. Ratliff