



Dummerston Planning Commission

Public Forum on Short Term Rentals

7:00 pm, Tuesday, June 6, 2017

Dummerston Community Center

Present

Planning Commissioners: Joe Little(Chair), Bev Tier, Annamarie Pluhar, Maria Glabach, Sarah Bergh, Deb Forrett, Sam Farwell, Nicole Talbot. Absent: Brian Richardson

Public: Roger Jasaitis (Zoning Administrator), Harold Newell, Jean Newell, Terry Chapman, Paul Chapman, Melissa Worden, Hugh Worden, Aishe Pandelaki, Keith Arnold, Catherine Dianich-Gruver, Tristram Johnson, Bev Tier, Carrie Towle, Bryan Wittler, Ann Davis, Patty Timney, Jean Momaney, Seamus Walsh, Len Oppenheim, Kathleen Fleischmann, Muriel Taylor, Bob Taylor, Daniel Ridlehoover, Alex Wilson, William McKim, Cheryl Wilfong, Michelle Simpson, Catherine O'Callaghan, Gurudharm Khalsa, Linda Rood, Roger Turner, Peter Thurrell, Natalie Blake, Nicholas Marchese, Richard Epstein, Jerelyn Wilson, Zeke Goodband, Ronan Khalsa, Stephanie Gates(sp?), Richard Holden, Alex Blakeson, Leslie Wilson, Nate Weeks, Ed Powers. (illegible name)

Joe Little called meeting to order at 7:00. Introduced the subject of short-term rentals, and why the Planning Commission is investigating it.

Roger Jasaitis described the current situation with short-term rental in Dummerston; described the letter that he sent to property owners who have advertised for short-term rentals.

Hugh Worden gave a brief description of the process to get a Conditional Use Permit in Dummerston.

Joe Little explained that short-term rentals are not well defined in the bylaws and that is why the planning commission is asking how the bylaw might need to be updated.

Cheryl Wilfong asked if long-term rental was considered commercial. Various town officials clarified that the Zoning Bylaw does not currently have regulations for rental units or homes.

Catherine Dianich-Gruver asked about switching from short-term rental to long-term rental, and Roger Jasaitis clarified that the current bylaws would not require a change in permit.

John Gregory: surprised that the town does not regulate long-term rentals; the risks are the same for long-term rental as for short-term rental.

Zeke Goodband: the VT rental housing code applies to rental units but not to homes that offer short-term rental.

Hugh Worden: different zoning districts have different characteristics; we shouldn't take a one-size fits all approach.

Roger Turner: what are the experiences that neighbors to short-term rentals have had that give them concern?

John Gregory: parking and turning on his lawn, parking in the street hindering traffic, stranger talking to his child, stranger in his neighborhood potentially every weekend.

Ronan Khalsa: guests are not "sketchy" people (cross talk)

Leslie Wilson: described AirBnB process of making sure that the renters meet certain criteria and confirm identity; average income from short-term rental in the area around \$5000 – \$6000 so typically it is not a business.

Terry Chapman: guests at a short-term rental have walked past her house at night and urinated on her lawn. (cross talk)

Stephanie Gates: Statistically it less likely that an Air BnB guest would commit a crime in the neighborhood than a random stranger driving in from the highway.

Paul Chapman: concerned about water, septic and fire safety; a house in West Dummerston is condemned because of failed septic system; unhappy with owners of short-term rentals advertising that parking is available across the street, generally unhappy when people don't follow the rules.

Natalie Blake: she did not break any rules; referred to a parking agreement she had with John Gregory; first attempts to update her advertising re "parking across the street" were unsuccessful however she was not belligerent; tried to read statements from some renters to describe their "caliber" but was encouraged to let others comment.

Gurudharm Khalsa: neighbor to short-term rental; happy to see the improvements in the properties that are used for short-term rental; enjoyed being able to have family stay there, thinks they add value to the community and the properties; never had a problem with parking, traffic or noise and likes having the guests in the neighborhood.

Keith Arnold: short-term rental is not so much commercial business as home sharing by residents. The short-term rental activity is necessary for local economy. No one should be peeing on anyone's lawn but hopes that people can work out the differences and allow short-term rentals to continue.

Kathleen Fleishman: never had any problem with short-term renters next door. Also rents her own home out short-term.

Bill McKim: rents an "in-law" apartment. The reviews on Air BnB are effective at vetting renters.

Alex Wilson: looking at regulating short-term rental is a slippery slope to long-term rental and home exchange; how do you draw the line between commercial use and residential activity. The problem can be best addressed by good communication. Referred to the vetting on Air BnB website. If we keep up with this, Dummerston will be perceived as regulation capital of the state.

Carrie Towle: in favor of more regulation because of the history in the neighborhood of problems that have not been adequately addressed; feels the impact of constant influx of renters staying in the village is a problem. Fire safety, septic, and parking are concerns. These issues may be different in other parts of town.

Tristram Johnson: representing Landmark Trust which has four properties on Air BnB. Guest have a positive effect on local economy. Described the comments and reviews on the Air BnB website that work as a check and balance on behavior of guests- and owners. This also creates incentive for the owner to keep the property in excellent condition. The system provides effective controls.

Michelle Simpson: described her neighborhood's (poplar commons) tension between commercial and residential zoning. Owns a trailer which she would like to rent short-term. Air BnB is a "disrupter" in the hospitality industry and we need to figure out what it means for us. Described a meeting of Air BnB owners hosted by Downtown Brattleboro Alliance(see written comment). None of the hosts prepares meals for guests-it is better described as "home stay"; short-term rental owners are not doing this as a business- usually as extra income for residents. Stressed the economic value of people visiting the area. Suggests that many people would not do this if they had to get permits.

Melissa Worden shares concerns with Carrie of strangers in the neighborhood.

(Jerelyn Wilson and Roger Jasaitis- clarifications)

Peter Thurrell: a lot of people do many different things to make ends meet. Taking away people's ability to live in their homes and make a living could be very detrimental; this must be balanced against a fear that something might happen. Best handled with dialogue rather than blanket regulations.

Paul Chapman: "I am living that fear"; house across street septic has failed. This lowers his home value. Some regulation is needed and it needs to be enforced.

Roger Turner: Lives outside the village but has plenty of strangers walking by his house; very concerned about fear leading to attempts to prevent people from coming into our neighborhoods.

Nick Marquise: Wanted to share the humanity of the guests that he and Natalie rent to (referring to Natalie's testimonials she wanted to read). Wondering about fear of the perceived "other". We invite people into our home which we have put our heart and soul into. Now it serves as a bridge between people.

Aishe Pandelaki: hearing basic health and safety (fire, septic) concerns and then concern about relationships between people. These are distinct issues. Safety can be addressed with some regulation. Relationships are important. Would like to travel to Spain and can only afford it through AirBnB. The level of security is very high.

Carrie Towle: any number of unknown people coming through the community changes the nature of the community. She is not fearing strangers. We need to have that conversation as a community.

Jean Newell: when she first moved to W. Dummerston 56 years ago, all the residents were related(!). Seen many changes over the years- many for better, some disturbing. Is a landlord and knows the responsibility of having renters. People are asking that the neighbors who are renting be respectful of other neighbors.

John Gregory: wants basic regulations in place for parking, safety, septic – not wanting to get rid of Air BnB. Wants a choice of who he gets to know.

Joe Little challenge for the PC is to find the middle ground.

Harold Newell if people don't get a permit who will enforce the violation?

Tristram Johnson: before PC goes to regulation let the owners get together and work out solutions.

Roger Turner: septic is a big problem in the village.

Catherine Dianich-Gruver tried to read a part of a letter but was told to submit in writing.