

Minutes for the March 2, 2023 Stonington Planning Board

Planning Board Members attending: Renee Sewall, Peter Haskell, Caleb Scott, Diana Turner, Ben Jackson

Public attending: 14 people in the room, 11 of whom were Stonington residents; 11 people on Zoom, the majority not Stonington residents

The meeting was called to order by Renee at 6:32 pm.

Item 1: Minutes from February 16th meeting approved

Item 2: Public hearing for proposed Short Term Rental Registration Ordinance

Questions and Comments from the Board:

Caleb:

- Article 2, Section 2 relating to building permits and site reviews: why are Non-Owner Occupied Split out separately?
 - Linda response: because the purpose of this ordinance is to limit future non-owner occupied development, as that is where the majority of the problems are reported, there are special requirements for Non-Owner Occupied STR's going forward.
- Article 3.5.B, non-refundable fees to be set by the Select Board?
 - Linda response: Examples of the ranges were provided in the research conducted by the STR Task Force and posted on the Town website since August. They range from a \$50 permit fee in Cape Elizabeth for those with Homestead Exemptions to \$400 in South Portland for non-hosted rentals
- I understand the 4-day minimum stay is to lessen the impact on resources. What are the other reasons?
 - Linda response: We are trying to get EVERYONE to lengthen minimum stays. Less impact on resources, the environment, the community. Statistics available that show cultural-heritage tourists, who stay longer, also have a higher, positive economic impact as travelers. This is about the Town using policy to shape which areas of the economy we want to grow and not grow.

Ben:

- Registration seems like a good first step for better water management of properties, by putting forward the need for individual metering
- This is a practical, real-life thing we can do to manage our water resources

Diana

- This is a good beginning, a strong beginning
- Based on a lot of research. Based on things that are working well, and are not onerous.

- We have many problems that have solutions in this proposal.

Renee

- This is not meant to punish anybody. We are trying to work with people to preserve our resources.
- This ordinance says: we have a problem. Let's do something about it.

Questions from Audience:

- Concerned the ordinance does not move needle in the right direction
- Would prefer to see a presentation of how this will move the economic needle forward
- Would like to see a draft of proposed fees
- Suggests it is too short time frame and requests a special meeting to address it
- Concerned about any municipal interference in how owners rent properties, especially 4-day minimum # of days. Needs more flexibility. Not enough hotel and motel rooms.
- Many people did not correctly understand that existing STR's are grandfathered from requirements for now (although they will have to register)
- Request that exceptions be made for landlords providing commercial and parking spaces
- Concerned about the distinction between resident and non-resident owned, feels it to be divisive
- Where is the evidence that short-term rentals use more resources than people living in homes?
- Maybe we should do a more comprehensive building plan and zoning rather than piecemeal ordinances.
- Will this incentivize year round rentals as it says it wants to?
- Unprecedented time in the economy with low interest rates for 20 years. Now times have changed. It is possible the market will change on its own. This is a part of a modern economy that is here to stay. There will be a shake out, there will be changes in it.
- This is a national problem. Every Town needs to act on it.
- Is the Housing Reserve being used to fund this initiative? Or does this require no additional funding?

Responses from Planning Board and Staff:

- This is a housing issue, part of a multi-part strategy being pursued by the Town that includes building new units
- We have people who can't afford to live here anymore. We need to address the people who do not have housing here.
- Nursing home closed because people can't find housing
- Shocking statistic: Hancock County has more STR than any other county in Maine.
- Camoin Associates, a nationally-recognized firm, has done two studies, one on housing and one on economic development, that we are basing proposals on
- What do we want this community to be? What is our vision? What do we really want? A fishing community or another Boothbay or Bar Harbor?

- This ordinance is a first step, a tool for the Planning Board
- Enforcement costs are covered in town budget, NOT by the proposed Housing Reserve which has a different function, to invest in housing opportunities such as matching funds for housing and planning grants, professional fees, purchasing land, etc. Gives the selectmen some tools to move forward in that area.
- Some of this falls within our Comprehensive Plan. One area is housing. We are obligated to address these things. Many of these articles align to what our Comprehensive Plan says. If we don't align the Plan, then the Town can't apply for future grant money and won't be able to sustain a year-round labor force and community.
- Water is a major issue and not easily solved
- It's not just Town water. Wells have to be drilled much deeper now than ever before, the aquifers have been drained from over use.
- We are going to try to educate EVERYBODY in Stonington on being careful with water.
- This is a first step. Have to take small steps. Might be a little rough and it is change and nobody likes change but we have to get started.

Texts from Zoom:

Philip Noyes (via text on Zoom):

- I am grateful that you are grandfathering owners that have been in operation. Can you provide a little more security on that? Perhaps noting that we will be grandfathered for 10 years? And/ or recognizing properties that are a hybrid (having an actual business and also doing short term rentals on the off season).

Harry Caldwell

- Given the concerns expressed about either the wisdom, or the value, of the proposed short term housing regs, does the proposal require measures of effectiveness or annual reports to determine whether the proposal is achieving the desired goals and what, if any, step 2 or revisions are required to make it more effective?
- This has become a national problem, so you have to start somewhere.

Renee closed down public hearing at 7:52 PM.

Renee asked for a vote to move ordinance forward to public vote at Monday's Town Meeting.

Ben moved, Diana seconded, vote was 4 - 1 (Scott).

Meeting adjourned at 8:02 PM.

Ben in front *Pat Stubb* *Renee Sewall*

[Signature] _____