

WATERTOWN PLANNING BOARD

DATE: March 13, 2024 PLACE: City Council Chamber TIME: 7:00 PM COMMENCED: 7:00 PM

PURPOSE OF MEETING: Public Hearing

PRESENT: Janet Buck, Chair; Jason Cohen; Abigail Hammett; Rachael Sack
Ingrid Marchesano, Clerk to the Board; Gideon Schreiber, Senior Planner; Larry Field,
Senior Planner

This is a hybrid meeting attended by the staff. All votes will be done via roll call.

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Abigail Hammett motioned to approve Minutes of 2/14/2024 meeting.

Jason Cohen seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In favor

CASES PENDING

10-30 Manley Way

Jason Cohen motioned to continue the petition to May 8, 2024 meeting as requested by the petitioner.

Abigail Hammett seconded the motion.

VOTE: 4-0 In favor

PUBLIC HEARING

Short Term Rentals

To consider Watertown Zoning Amendment as to Use category (replacing a previous renting of rooms use category) with supporting language, definitions, and a section for the requirements to operate short-term rentals as an accessory use within certain residential dwelling units.

Larry Field, Watertown has proposed to allow Short Term Rental previously. This proposal is different, limited to 2 types: 1.bedroom for when he operator is present; 1.home share when the operator is not present. Two forms of written evidence, primary residence in Watertown for owner. Notice to abutters, penalty process. Short term rentals will allow minor income, some owners are away for short time, or a small extra bedroom. It would allow the City to inspect and short term rental revenue. A risk of adverse impact on neighbors, undermine neighborhood. Potentially significant for the neighbors. The issue that divided the community is number of questions. Two persons per bedroom, three bedrooms, one for the owner, 2 to use for rentals. There will be abuse, low number of complaints.

Jason Cohen, this was a clear presentation. If we do not adopt, what is the situation now?

Larry Field, there are some operated right now, 154 operators are registered with the State as required. We do not know how often and how long are they operating. City is responded to complaints, on month by months basis. Operators have generally complied. The judgement by the department is to wait until approved.

Jason Cohen, are the complaints to the Police department or to the DCD&P?

Larry Field, if there is specific issue, the Police is called immediately for cars blocking, regarding trash, noise, etc.

Gideon Schreiber, police coordinates with zoning, building, health, etc.

Rachael Sack, how will it work in the future, we don't always know our neighbors. What would be the worst impact.

Larry Field, everyone who is within 300 feet of the short term rental, will be notified. The owners phone # will not be given. Violation could result in ticket as part of the Ordinance, it can be warning or a small fine. There will be a requirement to provide contact information. If the property does not have enough parking, it will make it less attractive.

Janet Buck, Planning Board hears this in 2021, this proposal is different from 6 years ago.

Janet Buck opened the hearing to the public at 7:40 pm.

Dean Martino, if you bring the short term rental to Watertown, it will change the neighborhood. If someone wants this change, they can ask for variance. If there are 1 or 2 STR on my street it will be a problem. There can be party houses, groups coming for the weekend. Who will it help, what is the reason. It will end up with the police to be called.

Jonathan Malehy, there is an Airbb on Irving Street for the past 1-1/2 years, 3 months at the time.

Larry Field, the owner has to own the home and has to be there 9 months out of the year. If the owner is absentee it is now illegal.

Jason Cohen, who do I call if its happening now?

Gideon Schreiber, right now you call the Zoning Enforcement Officer.

Leonard Gibson, we live in a 3 unit condo, two people are over 65, one is young and moved to Newton, he is renting the unit. We do not know the regulations. Mailing to residents would be helpful.

Larry Field, condo regulations would need to be approved or they have to be amended.

Joan Gumbleton, I am concerned with the owner not being present, more problems would be happening. We had such problem, and it went on for 3 years. City wide survey would be helpful, there are more people opposed than for it. Negative response in neighborhood, calling police at night and on weekends. Would you want one next to your house ?

Angie Kounelis, 55 Keenan, this came to light years ago. I was opposed than and I am still opposed. When issues happened, its always at night or on weekend, and police is called. Houses have many vehicles, etc. East end does not have enough parking, I am opposed.

Kathy Breen, I support property rights. Sharing service are part of our lives. We should not penalize owners. I oppose home sharing by business groups. Cars parked in public ways, I support the regulations for STR.

Elodia Thomas, the property has to be owner occupied. Home office had all the permits before they started. Same rules have to be before STR are allowed.

Linda Scott, I have a friend who did time sharing in Portugal. Things can happen when you allow other people to your house.

Mary Ann, 23 Falmouth, there are rule in Watertown but all are being violated. The STR would take more rental units of the market. It would not be enforceable, when the owner runs into problems, they call the police.

Dean Martino, parking regulations are not enforcement, cars have changed, SUVs are blocking the roads. It will be neighbors against neighbors.

Gideon Schreiber, we have received a letter from David Leon.

Janet Buck closed the public hearing at 8:15 pm.

Janet Buck, this is not limited to STR, we bought our house 40 years ago. Our neighbors live there with the entire families, it was very loud, now we are all friends. We always stipulated that the second unit had 1 parking space. STR are not party people. I have stayed in STR for up to 3 weeks. There are many hospitals in Boston and people cannot afford to stay in a hotel. Families coming to weddings and renting STR for family or friends. Most homes in Watertown are owner occupied.

Rachel Sack, what tools can we have to help with the issues? Enforcement and accountability are most important. Police has to make a decision how to prioritize. There are activities that are not allowed, I support transparency and structure.

Jason Cohen, I read all the materials, people think it will open flood gates to STR. I am 100% sure that it needs to be regulated, its already happening. Lots of comments are making the case. We have lots of problems, MBTA Community Act. I don't want Watertown to be different by not being welcoming. This would benefit lots of people, amendments need to be made, up to 31 days after you move in.

Abigail Hammett, you have to consider people that will allow them to pay mortgage or provide income. I have a friend who lives in Cambridge and rents our accessory unit as STR some time. Housing is too expensive, it will allow additional income. Limit to homeowners, no to business, more flexibility to allow generate income. Easier for families to travel. I agree with loss of rental units, that would happen if companies buy many units.

Jason Cohen, it is not that many people are waiting for STR to be allowed. Funds collected will be used for enforcement.

Larry Field, that is up to the City Council. DCD&P will be allowed to set the fees.

Jason Cohen, I am in support of reducing the # of people from 10 to 8.

Larry Field, 6 is the max for limited share.

Jason Cohen motioned to recommend to the City Council to adopt the Short Term Rental Amendment to the Watertown Zoning Ordinance with change to add the following as the second sentence of Section 5.19(d): DCD&P is authorized to adopt a schedule of reasonable fees to cover the costs

associated with the administration of this section and to endorse the draft regulations, with changes to conform to the final Ordinance on adoption of the Zoning Amendments,
Abigail Hammett seconded the motion. VOTE: 4-0 In Favor

OTHER

Planning Board Rules of Practice & Procedures

Jason Cohen motioned to continue the above discussion to the May 8 meeting of the Planning Board.
Abigail Hammett seconded the motion. VOTE: 4-0 In favor

Janet Buck adjourned the meeting at 9:00 pm.