

Joint Town Council and Planning Board Webinar Workshop on Vacation Rental September 9, 2020, Webinar

NOTES

Attending

Town Council: Chair Jeff Dobbs, Vice Chair Matthew Hochman, and Councilors Erin Cough, Gary Friedmann, Jill Goldthwait, Joseph Minutolo, and Valerie Peacock.

Planning Board: Chair Tom St. Germain, Vice Chair Joe Cough, Secretary Erica Brooks, and members Basil Eleftheriou and Millard Dority.

Staff: Manager Cornell Knight, Planning Director Michele Gagnon, Code Enforcement Officer Angie Chamberlain, and Assistant Planner Steve Fuller.

Discussion: The workshop started at 5:00 PM. Ms. Gagnon made some general remarks pertaining to the Housing Policy Framework, and the relationship between year-round housing and vacation rental (VR).

Board member Joe Cough asked who suggested the 7.5% cap of VR-2 to year-round housing. He was reminded that it came from the Planning Board. Ms. Gagnon explained it was first presented to the Planning Board at 5%, and as the proportion is presently at around 10%, the Planning Board agreed to a middle-of-the road approach at 7.5%.

A conversation ensued about the respective roles of the Town Council (elected body) and the Planning Board (appointed body), including mentions of bias and conflict of interests. Councilor Goldthwait noted that we all have an interest, it's either on one side or the other side of the issue.

Board Chair St. Germain expressed concerns over regulations that would increase non-conformity.

Council Chair Dobbs said that he would like to see VR treated differently in four districts: Downtown Village I and II, Hulls Cove Business, and Town Hill Business districts.

The group decided to continue the discussion with the flow chart questions attached to the agenda. As this was a workshop, no official votes were taken; however, unofficial straw polls were taken to gauge where people were on the issues. A total of 12 people expressed their views: seven Town Councilors and five Planning Board members. Following are the questions that were asked and the general responses.

1. Do you want to further regulate VR?

Of the 12 people, all mentioned that they did want to further regulate VR with the exception of one person who said no, they did not and another who said they were non-committal, a maybe.

2. Do you want two different type of VRs (VR-1 and VR-2)?

All twelve people agreed that there should be at least two types of VRs.

3. VR-1

a) Do you want to allow VR-1 in the same 34 districts where VRs are presently allowed?

All twelve people said yes.

b) Do you want the maximum number of VR-1 licenses to be two at the primary residence?

All twelve people were in favor of this.

c) Do you want to allow nightly rental of VR-1

There was clearly a difference of opinion between the members of the Planning Board and the Council on this topic. Four of the five Planning Board members said that they did not want to allow nightly rental of VR-1 while five Councilors said that they did want to allow nightly rental. Two councilors were in favor of doing nightly rental in the shoulder season only.

d) Do you want to allow the transfer of a VR-1 converted to a VR-2?

The group was pretty evenly split on this.

e) Do you want to restrict the transfer of VR-1 to heirs?

There was a prevalence of people saying no, but clearly people felt that more discussion was warranted.

4. VR-2

a) Do you want to allow VR-2 in the same 34 districts where VRs are presently allowed?

All five Planning Board members and two councilors said yes but most wanted to have more discussion. Five Councilors said no but also wanted more discussions.

There was an interest in reviewing the zoning districts to understand better which, if any, were entirely dedicated to residential uses.

b) Do you want the maximum number of VR-2 licenses capped at 7.5% of the total # of dwelling units?

Three people responded no, one wanted it to be higher and one wanted it to be lower. The rest said yes but mentioned that they wanted more discussion.

c) Do you want to restrict the minimum rental period for VR-2 to 4 nights?

Nine people said yes with four wanting more discussion, while one of them wanted the minimum number of nights to be greater than 4.

d) Do you want to allow the transfer of a VR-2? and e) Do you want to restrict the transfer of VR-2 to heirs?

Question d) and e) were taken together. There was a prevalence of people saying yes to both but they clearly wanted to have more discussion.

The workshop ended at 7:45 PM.

Notes prepared by Michele Gagnon, Planning Director