**Summary - Second Community Meeting on STR**

On Wednesday July 20, 2022, a second ‘Community Conversation’ was held to get further input from residents on the issues surrounding Short-Term Rentals in Stonington. While this is a challenging issue, community members deserve to be further engaged so that the diverse views on this topic can be better understood by all. Stonington’s ‘Community Conversation’ meetings are utilized to offer residents different ways to engage outside of the more tradition format of formal Town Meetings. Too often we see the more formal Town Meetings put people into ‘For’ & ‘Against’ segments, and they do not help facilitate civil discourse and can lead to less productive outcomes.

This meeting was the second community engagement, the first was held on June 20, 2022. To re-engage, this meeting posed seven questions to attendees and input was captured by participants discussing their views among small roundtables set-up to encourage direct dialogue. All attendees were then asked to summarize their group’s responses in writing, as well as through a brief, verbal report back to the larger group.

The summary below is our best attempt to capture the key points raised under different questions.

We plan to hold another meeting in late September or October. In the meantime, we continue to welcome ideas, questions or concerns ahead of the next meeting, and that can come in the form of emails, phone calls or in-person meetings. Residents can contact the Director of Economic and Community Development, Susan Cullen, scullen@stonington-ct.gov or First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough at dchesebrough@stonington-ct.gov.

**General Comments**

- Ensure that the listings state there are no parties allowed.
- Be sure there is a clear definition of STR for the regulation; offer one stop registration; and distinguished business versus individual owners.
- Review permit process, check residence property management, and capacity limits.
- Importance of open communication across perspectives.
- Cooperation across neighbors, neighborhoods and government.
- Establish a clear understanding of the common goal.
- Top three takeaways: carve out for people who live in the property/owner occupants of STR, no more boards, penalty money
- There are responsible STR owners – mostly owner occupied or low capacity, establish a mechanism to separate the good from the bad, no grandfathering
- If town moves forward should make a distinction between owner occupied and Non-owner occupied, let existing town ordinances govern, more safeguards with STR and money spent in community
- For permitting and enforcement, not for spacing, against parties
- Permit process yes, some number of strikes over some amount of time, creation of board enforcement should be revenue positive and paid for by permit and violation fees, need a permanent form for dynamic, evolving Market public forum website to list complaints peer pressure will save town enforcement dollars, occupancy, number of cars, number of pets, number of toddlers based on true bedrooms in the STR.
1. Should the Town require all STR properties to register and obtain a permit? *As part of the registration the Town could require certain information be provided to both guests, as well as neighbors.*

**General**
- The Town should have permits with a cost and process outlined.
- The Town should have a STR public directory with contact information of the owner or property manager and require photo IDs.

**A. What are the benefits of such a process?**
- let’s neighbors contact owners
- adds structure to process
- gives the town account and oversight
- owner occupied should have no registration, non-owner occupied should have a registration
- know where the STR’s are located and who to contact if issues arise
- contact individual, safety, law enforcement, fire, how many and where, quality of life
- registering/permitting provides valuable information
- structure creates consistent respectful relationships and rules about parties
- register and maintain a permit, have control, organization, definition of what’s acceptable, security if not owner-occupied, points of contact, rules, commercial limiting, pay for enforcement permit fee

**B. What are the potential challenges or unintended consequences?**
- do not give information of the renter directly to the neighbors versus allow the renters contact info to be released neighbors
- database maintenance
- data on disturbances- how many? What neighborhoods? How handled?
- enforcement, cost and fees, non-compliance, possible infringement of property rights
- info out of date, harassment, privacy issues
- workload on town officials, enforcement, limiting effect on rentals

**C. How should the Town be defining STR’s in regards to requiring permits?**
- define what an STR is, including length of stay, number of occupants and ownership structure
- less than 30 days
- one to 29 days rentals
- non family members, less than 90 days, detached structures, square footage
- 30 days or less

**D. What requirements should be part of the permit process?** For example, the Town could require all STR properties to include a 24/7 contact that neighbor can access if issues arise.
• insurance, smoke detectors, taxes up-to-date
• 24/7 contact, penalties for violation, process for violation
• local contact to manage or oversee issues as part of the permitting process
• up to code, well maintained
• POC’s (24/7), occupancy limits, neighbor sign offs on permits- possibility of abutting neighbors having a vote, notification of applications to neighbors

2. Establish a new Board that would deal with certain STR related issues.

General
• Yes, short term issues should be handled by the owner or designated local contact, clear responsibility and authority in charter, small, action oriented, representing owners and neighbors, responsible for long-term language of rules by issuing guidelines, educate owners, and encourage inclusion in house rules, systematically report changes, issues, etc. to the neighborhood.
• board set up by short term owners if that equals additional work of a small minority; why are we adding work

A. What are the benefits of such a process?
• one place for people to go
• mechanism for review
• advocate; someone council can go to
• centralized process, single authority communication source, consistent adjudication not ad hoc, single topic of affordable focus
• a structure with clear expectation; develop expertise consistent application of regulations
• no board; planning and zoning officials go to existing board members

B. What are the potential challenges or unintended consequences?
• additional cost and bureaucracy, loss of privacy; raises taxes and fees
• personal agendas
• appointed or elected? What is their power? Diversity and inclusion
• favoritism who gets on the board need term limits what is the mandate rules and regulations
• more meetings burden on town

C. What specific issues should this Board have oversight regarding?
• set parameters permitting, hear complaints, revoke permits
• ensuring paperwork filed correctly and concerns addressed
• staffing it? Volunteers? How to develop board and ensure equitable representation is not one-sided
• permitting, adjudication with a platform for resolution and authority for issues that arise? Authorize or rescind a permit, no enforcement in this body to avoid politicization
• upholding neighborhood quality of life, board has power to enforce three strikes
3. Require a spacing distance or limit the number of STRs in a set area.

**General**
- yes, but defining parameters will be complex, clarify roles of town council, planning and zoning, and short-term rental board, fair regarding walkability/distance from center, grandfathering, sale of property, etc.
- will be enforcing rules therefore N/A
- support 50%

**A. What could be fair boundaries and limitations?**
- look at best practices across the country
- don’t limit, number of occupants doesn’t change, brings money into town
- owner lives there none applies, new purchases for STR standalone don’t exceed
- limit STR’s in set area, zoning physical or usage, voting districts, should be no limits, geographical neighborhoods, Easily identified, a neighbor that’s a cul-de-sac cut off by a lake

**B. What are the benefits of such a process?**
- residents can maintain control, prevent clumps
- property taxes increase, properties improved, more taxes for the town, no stress on schools, no stress on other services, for example Human Services
- more discussion needed; reduce pressure on policing
- possible property
- prevent a residential area from being corroded into a commercial area prevent corrosion of neighborhood

**C. What are the potential challenges or unintended consequences?**
- excessive regulation
- lawsuits versus town, unworkable
- how to choose the number and definition of area, ambiguity of identifying neighborhood, grandfathering, fairness to residence

**D. If that Town gave a certain timeframe to register any existing STRs, should all existing rentals be considered ‘grandfathered’ in and only new STR requests need to meet this?**
- no grandfathering
- If we register yes, if space then grandfather
- definitely yes, but mystic wide limits definitely no

4. Prohibit Events at STRs, which could be defined as a gathering of persons that are occupants of the short-term rental and others that are not guests/occupants. Occasions such as weddings, graduation parties, or other gatherings of people would be considered as an event. Events can be either indoor or outdoor.
A. What are the benefits of such a process?
• more compliance with existing town ordinances equal better neighbors and goodwill, prevents profiteering – weeds out commercial enterprise, prevents wear and tear on properties
• residential, keeping peace, Music, parking
• no parties – number of people should be consistent with the number of beds
• no events and also up to owner to decide yes. no- depending on space noise and parking, concern for liability
• prevents a party house, limit gatherings to avoid disrupting quality of life
• except for specific locations such as farms or large properties with no neighbors

B. What are the potential challenges or unintended consequences?
• enforcement, personal parties being mistaken for Airbnb party house
• enforcement
• no events, no downside

5. Additional permit allocation considerations: Prohibit private entities from obtaining permit; Prohibit non-residents, unless they obtain a special authorization (via a channel yet to be established); and/or limit the number of STR properties that can be registered under one name.

A. What, if any, of the above limitations should be included in a possible ordinance?
• different permits for companies, large corporations, local representations, local mom and pop biz except residence
• no; self-governed and positive public reviews on platforms
• prohibit non-residents, except grandfathered; for example snowbird residence, single entity LLCs OK, no public companies
• yes, prohibit private entities
• important distinction (No private entity)
• prohibit non-residence (would benefit residence sense of community enhanced)
B. What are the benefits of any of these limitations?
- no, no limit of STR’s by number as long as following rules
- avoids commercial intrusion into residential neighborhoods
- how to enforce prohibition against private entities difficult in making it work
- legal issues, dynamic life choices bring long-term residents out of area, small distinctions, Pawcatuck - could be political
- could be gotten around too easily; hard to enforce

C. What are the potential challenges or unintended consequences?
- update zoning challenges

D. If that Town gave a certain timeframe to register any existing STRs, should all existing rentals be considered ‘grandfathered’ in and only new STR requests need to meet any of these additional limitations?
- Yes
- no grandfathering

6. Establish a mechanism for violations of the ordinance. What should the consequences for violating aspects of a new potential ordinance on STR, or existing ordinances, be? In answering, please consider issues such as noise, events, or not registering for a permit. For example, should there be one warning, followed by a fine and finally a revoking of a permit.

- permits levels, warning/fine/revoke
- consequences: yes, warning, fine, loss of permit
- needs to have clear guidelines for consequences
- central information repository with rules and guidelines for all STR’s in the community
- for properties that are grandfathered in, grandfathered properties should require registration and permitting
- forum for neighbor/local manager/STR owner discussion
- establish a mechanism for violations
- one warning, then fire them, then revoke the permit, should definitely be a process, there should be statute of limitations or similar time frames (so many violations in a year)
- hire someone to oversee violations and this proposition has proven revenue positive in other communities, in other words, violation fees plus permit fees pay the “enforcers” salary
- violations of ordinance: strike policy, 1. $500 fine paid by guest; 2. $1000 fine, including clear documentation, photo/video with actual police complaint visit
- escalating enforcement. Rules clearly defined. Offenders permit should be revoked
- ordinance violation clause in Airbnb/VRBOSTR contract surrender to department called (fire department)
7. What possible aspects of a future Ordinance was not covered that your table would like to see covered. Please include the benefits and challenges, alongside any additional ideas.

- find a way to maintain and integrate STR into a feeling of community within the existing neighborhood
- incentivize owner occupied and hosts that are good neighbors
- ordinance aspects not covered, over regulations/loss of income to owners, STR’s bring $26 million annually to the town, traveling nurses, Navy, contractors
- define, educate, and enforce the noise ordinance
- define, educate, and enforce parking restrictions, this is a much larger issue
- evaluate, define, educate and enforce trash management
- zoning enforcement fire pit/fire department to call law enforcement
- new ideas, occupancy limits based on number of bedrooms two renters per bedroom, two renters per bedroom max no cheating by landlords with cots in closets as a bedroom, square footage?
- car/parking limits based on number of bedrooms, would eliminate “jersey shore “type rentals where you have seven cars show up with seven separate states represented on the license plate
- limit pets and toddlers
- length of stay
- 12 people, five toddlers, four dogs, seven cars, 12 bikes, three watercrafts renting one 2200 square-foot cottage is not OK and is a true example from real life landlord has simply ignored complaints for years this transforms the neighborhood fundamentally by tripling people and dog population for best months of the year and could be fixed simply with occupancy and car limits by number of bedrooms