

Hague Short Term Rental Committee

June 16, 2022

Participants

In Person

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John Macionis <macionis@kenyon.edu>
Sandra Rust <sjrust@gmail.com>

Via Zoom

Jonathan Smith <jonathansmith.221@yahoo.com>

Absent

Alice Patchett <alice.patchett60@gmail.com>

Assignment for This Meeting

Come up with ideas or language that would edit the existing document. Think about how we protect the town and the community in which we want to live.

Comments

Josh

- The ordinance proposed in May 2021 is wordy but he doesn't see a real issue with what was proposed. However, it's not going to get to the issue(s) concerning people, particularly the ability to rent.
- The bigger issue is whether the town should permit renting and how to regulate renting. Should we limit rentals to 2+ weeks? That sort of rule would deter investor-only owners.

Frank

- Seasonal rentals have been a fundamental part of the history of Lake George.

John

- Renting changes the character of life for neighbors and renting will accelerate over time if we do nothing. We won't have the same opportunity to manage change if we wait 3, 5, or 10 years.

- There are areas of Hague that are more commercial (Sliver Bay, Hague hamlet) and other areas that are neighborhoods. Yet, there seems to be no zoning in place.
- There are three ways to managing STRs: zoning, time/duration of rental, & regulations. Zoning seems the only enforceable method.

Chris

- He thinks zoning is the solution and that short-term rentals (<30 days) should not be permitted in residential areas.
- We could require people to be actively paying the bed tax to be able to be grandfathered.
- For him personally, his biggest issue with the STR next door is with a renter who rents for three weeks.

Frank

- We need to define what is "short-term".
- Should we have some distinction between people who use their properties.
- Grandfathering is important because otherwise it's a bait-and-switch, similar to docks [if boat houses had to be removed].
- Owners are often as much an issue as renters.
- We cannot legislate what people do with their property if the behavior is legal.
- There are a lot of distinctions that could be made, e.g. publicly-advertised vs. word-of-mouth rentals.
- We should determine how many rentals are happening now.
- Maybe we could cap the number of rental properties permitted in Hague. We would need to determine the legality of that.

Jonathan

- The proposed STR ordinance is okay mostly the way it is. The main issues with it are:
 - The speed with which it was getting implemented (within months of first being announced)
 - The ease with which the town board can change the ordinance (only 10 days notice)
 - Different rules for STRs vs. owner-occupied properties (e.g. noise/fireworks/waste receptacles)
 - Each day counting as a separate offense for issues that might take time to resolve
- Rentals have been occurring for decades on Friends Point, e.g. by Bill Commons. It seems he could not have kept his property otherwise.
- We should assess the economic impact of people renting. Rentals have a significant economic impact for businesses like Dockside Landing Marina.
 - According to Stephanie at Dockside, 95% of their boat rentals come from visitors who rent lodging and boat rentals make up 70% of their overall business. So, overall, two-thirds of their business comes from short-term rental visitors.
 - Dockside employs 20 people in the summer and six in the shoulder seasons. So, maybe most of those people would lose their employment.

- Could Dockside even stay in business without STRs? Residents might lose their services too.

Tim

- We need enforce the rules already in place.
- Rentals should be two-week minimum.
- Owners could be told they cannot rent for the first X years of ownership.

Bill

- New owners should be restricted from renting the first X years.
- If we implement zoning, then STRs should be 2+ weeks in residential areas; need to have zoning implemented to make this work.
- Regarding regulations, anything put on STRs should apply to owners.
- The town code already says only one rental permitted per property.
- The only effective way to help the situation at Indian Kettles is to enforce the current rules.

Sandra

- Main points from May 2021 Public Hearing:
 - (1) It felt like renters were being singled out as problem people
 - (2) rentals should not be treated differently than owners
- Hague is a tourist town but has no lodging. We need STRs to provide lodging. This was Alice Patchett's point at the May 2021 Public Hearing.

Edna

- We need to speak with the town attorney to check on the legality of the ideas that have been proposed (zoning, rental caps).
- Edna will find the minutes from the May 2021 public hearing.

Concluding Comments

The committee's focus isn't to specifically address issues with Indian Kettles but rather STRs in general and how to keep Hague an enjoyable place for year-round and seasonal residents.

People on the committee are concerned about the following:

1. Year-round residents getting priced out of the housing market, particularly by investors looking for lower-cost off-lake properties to rent out.
2. The character of residential neighborhoods changing because of STRs, i.e. transient visitors who make more noise and activity.
3. Noise coming from STRs, especially those where the owner is off-site and thus not monitoring the renters.

Summary of Suggestions

- New owners in residential areas would have a three year waiting period before they could offer a property as a short-term rental; exception might be for intra-family sales. Other exceptions could be appealed to the town Planning Board.

- Require rentals to be 2+ weeks in residential areas.
- Grandfather current rentals that are on-record as paying the Warren County bed tax.
- Cap short-term rentals to the current number of those who have been grandfathered. Cap would not apply to rentals longer than two weeks.
- Grandfathering would expire on change of ownership.
- Need to prevent full-time commercial properties in residential areas.

Action Items

- **John** will investigate what is happening in Bolton.
- **John** will share additional thoughts in an email/Word document.
- **Edna** will ask the town attorney to participate in the next meeting and offer input on proposed rules.
- **Edna** will find the minutes from the May 2021 public hearing.

Emotional Outburst

At the end of the meeting, Chris expressed his frustrations by declaring loudly that he had “paid a lot of money to live in Hague for the quiet, not Lake George Village or Bolton, and these f*ing people [renting next to him] are ruining it!!” He repeated this several times while pounding his fist on the table.

Post Meeting

An active email discussion occurred in the days after the meeting in which Chris declared that absentee/remote landlords are the primary issue by allowing unmonitored renters to disturb neighbors; he said such STRs should be forbidden in residential neighborhoods, as having a property manager would be an inadequate solution.

With salty language, Chris made biting criticism of such landlords, including a fellow committee member. He said their motive was profit. Jonathan countered that most people who rent-out their properties also want to enjoy the properties themselves. [Their motive is not profit but a desire to mitigate costs, particularly the high taxes.]

Jonathan said the committee should assess the magnitude (frequency and severity) of incidents in Hague, and whether they were related to STRs. [Are the issues at Indian Kettles / Slacks Bay anomalous or typical of STRs?] Absentee/remote landlords have as much interest in having good renters as on-site landlords.

Jonathan also said the town needs a noise ordinance if the main concern is STRs in residential areas disturbing neighbors. If the town does not want a noise ordinance, then STRs should not become the scapegoat. If the main concern is investors buying up housing stock, the committee has some ideas that might help curtail that.

Tim thought we should take action immediately by enforcing existing rules and put a moratorium on new STRs until the STR situation can be adequately addressed. He thinks there should be no more STRs. He thought properties could be grandfathered if they are complying with current rules, e.g. the Warren County bed tax. He also thought penalty fines should be very stiff with a three-strike rule.

Tim offered ideas on what should be the content of a letter to send to town residents to find out who rents and to advise them that rules for STRs are under review. Edna said we need to wait on sending a letter until after the attorney is consulted.

Next Meeting

Thursday, July 14, 2022 @ 4:00pm-5:00pm EDT.