

While I understand the need for a procedure for comments, it is difficult to provide the context around a comment in the current format. Please bear with me as I try to do so.

Context 1: Calling owners and police.

Since this seems to keep being repeated as an easy solution, I feel as abutters of short-term rentals, we are perhaps not making the reality of our situation clear enough.

I will offer another incident.

One morning a renter's young child was riding his big wheel in front of our house. He decided to make a quick detour into our driveway. We have a Chihuahua. She is controlled by an invisible fence and has a dog door. She takes her property rights seriously and thought it was necessary to go outside and bark at the child on the bike. The child was surprised and fell off the big wheel. By this time, Dad, shirtless with beer in hand at 11:00 in the morning arrived on the scene. I was about to apologize when he glared at me and told me I should keep my dog in the house.

My options:

Ignore the inappropriateness and rudeness--which I did.
Tell the home owner, which I also did several weeks later.
Call the police--which I did not do.

Resolution:

Thanks to Chihuahua power, the incident was unlikely to be repeated. Telling the owner got the response that they wouldn't rent to these people again especially since their check bounced.

Calling the police, which I felt stupid doing over such a minor incident, would likely have resulted in a visit to the renters asking them not to trespass on private neighborhood property, a goal already accomplished. I really don't think we want the police involved every time a renter's child comes on private property or Dad flicks a butt on the beach. It is the aggregate of these small annoyances that begins to wear on one. Solving a issue with one group one week, does not mean that you won't have a similar issue with next week's group.

Context 2: Economic benefits of short term renters in our community.

There is a point to be made that visitors add dollars to our local economy. However, since I don't own a local business, there are no direct benefits to me--just cost in the depression of my property values and obstacles to the sale my home if I would need to do so.

This summer the character of the rental groups has been very different. There were many very large groups who brought their own coolers full of food and who never left the property.

As a full-time resident of this town I shop frequently at the IGA, buy my lobsters and produce locally, buy whatever the kids are selling to support their activities, donate our bottles and favor strong the school and town budgets. Should we tire of living next to the "mini Disney resort" and retire elsewhere, I think our economic contributions and those of individuals similar to us with strong ties to the community would missed a lot more than those of a transient renter who buys a bottle of wine at the IGA.

Context 3: Over regulation, unintended consequences, ordinances “with teeth”

My comments here are not directed at anyone, nor are they meant to imply that our appointed and elected officials and this committee are not doing an heroic job of trying to grapple fairly with issues.

It has been my experience that until the elephants in a room are recognized and discussed, very little is accomplished. So here are the ones I see charging around this issue.

The biggest is the recent tax assessment which, please excuse the vernacular, really “stuck it to” anyone near the water. My husband is 67. He is still working 10 hour days and getting up at 4:30 in the morning to make a flight. While our assessment went up 30%, our income has been stagnant at best. At some point we hope to retire and it remains to be seen if we have planned well enough to stay in our home in our old age. When we discussed this with Matt Sturgis, he pointed out to us in a polite and respectful way that it was not his job to make our taxes affordable for us. In the same sense, while I don’t want to bring financial hardship on anyone, I believe it is a lot to expect of neighbors to make a house affordable for another owner by sacrificing their own quality of life, property values and financial well-being.

The other elephant in the room is a political climate that is hostile to government. When we first moved to Maine in 1977 we notice that zoning and building codes were a lot more relaxed than we were used to in the Midwest. This was refreshing to us. You could actually change a light fixture without two inspectors and three guys from the union. But we also noticed negatives. I remember visiting a neighborhood in the early 80’s and seeing a cottage with a pipe that was delivering raw sewage directly into the ocean. When I said something about it, I was told that it had been going on for many years, the owners were older, they were not there all year...etc...etc. Frankly I was shocked that anyone could find this acceptable. Eventually the situation in this neighborhood was addressed, but it took government intervention and not everyone was happy at the time.

I respect my neighbor’s rights but sometimes you need to stand up and say: This is not OK. So while I appreciate the caution of this committee in not wanting to over-regulate and create unintended consequences, I would like to point out that **not regulating** enough or ineffectively is also **a choice with unintended consequences**. In the instance of short term rental business, I fear that if we (elected and appointed officials and residents) are unwilling to stand up for the **true intent of residential zoning**, there will be dire unintended consequences. In 20 years we may wake up to find many of our residential, family neighborhoods--gone. The families who once lived in these neighborhoods and formed the core of our community--gone. In their place will be commercial, transient and recreational properties, owned in many cases by out-of-state interests. I hate to think that we will be looking around and wondering--How did we get here?