

The meeting came to order at 7 p.m. Present were commissioners Chris Williams (chair), Mike Foley, and Mike Cichanowski; Select Board chair Tim Scoggins; and zoning administrator Shelly Stiles.

Mr. Cichanowski moved to approve the November 29, 2017 minutes. Mr. Foley seconded the motion, which passed 3-0-0.

The commission returned to its discussion of the possibility of adding “hostel” to the range of housing options in town. (A draft definition, crafted at earlier meetings, is “a single room rental occupancy without full housekeeping facilities that does not cater to the traveling public. Multiple unit conversions of former hotels are envisioned in this occupancy. This occupancy is not defined by the length of client’s stay.” The PC also agreed that the following conditions would be required for any hostel.

- An onsite manager is required. [Perhaps that should be a requirement based on number of units, rather than a blanket requirement.]
- All public safety code requirements for public buildings must be met.
- The thermal envelope must be upgraded, in a manner to be defined. The intention is to bring the housing up to 21st century standards, and to ensure that the owner can sustain the enterprise in the face of increasing fuel oil costs.
- Common space must contain a full kitchen and living/recreation space to be defined on the basis of the number of units.)

Mr. Williams said he’d talked with Fire Safety about annual inspections. The representative said they would do an initial inspection upon change of use, but could not guarantee annual inspections thereafter. Fire Safety noted that the Town Health Officer, who has a check list for rental housing safety issues, would be a reasonable alternative. Mr. Williams said he’d talked with Jim Sullivan at the Regional Commission, who told him that towns all over the state have been struggling with this issue, unsuccessfully, for years.

The commission discussed an email from town attorney Merrill Bent, and whether the existing use at a former motel in town is pre-existing non-conforming, or simply not permitted. (A permit for the change of use was never applied for.)

Mr. Williams said the conditions under consideration are necessary because so many people are involved (although, admittedly, the town has no similar jurisdiction over apartment houses – which are governed by state building and health codes). Participants wondered how the requirements would be enforced. It is likely such establishments would hold at least one unit open for the “traveling public.” Maybe a certain minimum number of rooms would need to be kept available.

Next steps? Refer the matter of whether the above conditions can be imposed to a lawyer. Initiate a statewide conversation as this issue is challenging and could have unintended consequences.

A resident asked about creating a tiny houses development offering short term rentals in R zones. Should the town allow commercial development in a residential neighborhood? Mr. Foley pointed out that this is already happening via AirBNB. (Many Shaftsbury properties are listed as available on line.) Mr. Scoggins asked why such a development would be different from AirBNB. It would be a new thing in the landscape. People would wonder about its impacts on home values.

Issues to be explored: how to allow commercial uses in R zones? What kinds of setbacks are required? Number of units and separation of units? Laws governing rental housing.

Mr. Williams noted that the ZA had not had a review since her appointment. Ms. Stiles will submit a report to the Commission.

The meeting adjourned by acclamation at 9 pm.