

To: Newburyport City Council

CC: Newburyport Planning Board

Date: May 8, 2023

Re: Short Term Rentals in Newburyport

Councillors,

In considering whether and under what circumstances to allow STRUs in our community, we need to address the subject holistically; we cannot separate the zoning decision from the issues of licensing and enforcement. To do otherwise, as Councilor Zeid proposes, is akin to accepting a job offer before knowing the job description or terms of employment, e.g., salary, benefits, hours, and so forth. The devil is in the details, as they say, and we don't yet know the details. This ordinance should not be allowed to go forward without the accompanying rules and regulations.

Furthermore, we should not even consider allowing STRUs unless we have the resources and commitment to manage them. Thus far the City has not shown itself to be willing or able to enforce the current zoning laws, hence enabling illegal STRUS to continue to operate unfettered. No ordinance should be approved by Council without having first received a firm commitment from the administration to enforce the regulations and details on how that will be done. Licensing fees should be high enough to cover the cost of enforcement, similar to our parking.

There can be good reasons to want STRUs; sufficiently constrained and properly managed, STRUs can offer potential value within the community. They provide a place for our out-of-town guests to stay for those of us with limited space; they bring visitors who may shop and dine in our local businesses; they provide a means for residents with limited financial means to afford to stay in their homes. However, there is NO reason to let STRUs operate in such a way as to disturb our neighborhoods and disrupt the fabric of our community.

So how can we protect our neighborhoods? First and foremost, we do not allow investor-owned units within our residential zones, including R-3. Outside investors have one motivation: to make money. Investor-owned STRUs are strictly profit-seeking businesses, with no emotional ties to our community and no incentive to preserve the fabric of our neighborhoods. They should be limited to the business zones within our City, if at all. (Plum Island is a special case, given its history, so I will leave it to those residents to determine what works for them.)

Second, we limit the concentration of STRUs in any one street or neighborhood. Too many strangers coming and going can quickly destroy the social fabric of the community, diminishing the sense of familiarity, safety and comfort that knowing your neighbors provides. Furthermore, limiting the concentration within a neighborhood also reduces the stress on our already-scarce parking.

Third, we establish and enforce regulations designed to maintain our quality of life. These include such measures as restricting activities (parties, number of visitors, quiet hours, etc.), and establishing parking protections for permanent residents and/or off-site parking for visitors. I love the idea of requiring STRUs in the business zones to secure leased parking spaces in the City's parking garage for their guests.

Fourth, we require on-site presence of either the owner or their qualified, registered agent who is required to familiarize their guests on the rules and neighborhood code of conduct (parking, trash disposal, etc.) and is available 24x7 to address complaints promptly (within the hour) and effectively. To ensure ongoing owner involvement, owners should nonetheless be limited in the number of days their unit operates during their absence.

Fifth, we further strengthen the teeth of these regulations by imposing meaningful fines which escalate until the third and final violation, when the license is revoked and reapplication prohibited for three or more years. We need to ensure sufficient incentive for STRUs to self-regulate if this is to work at all.

Sixth, we build in contingency plans as this experiment plays out. We begin with a pilot program in which new STRU licenses and special permits have a probationary period of one year. If there are no complaints regarding the unit during that time, their license is extended for another year. After three years, if there are no unresolved complaints, the license or permit may be renewed for a full term.

Local governments have an obligation to safeguard and protect the interests of their residents. Preserve what makes this community a wonderful place to live. Do this right, protect our neighborhoods (and our housing stock) by keeping it small, local and well-regulated, so that we welcome STRUs rather than resent them.

Respectfully,

Mary (Kitty) Krajci
232 High Street