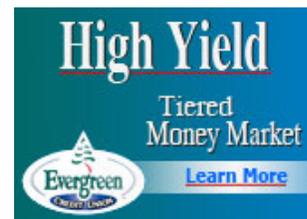


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Report: Town acted properly on Pine Point motel

By **Meggan Clark**
Reporter

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SCARBOROUGH (April 3, 2008): Town staff acted properly in allowing the controversial Lighthouse Inn motel to convert to condominium ownership, a new report from the town attorney and town manager says.

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The Town Council requested the report more than a month ago after residents of the Pine Point area raised numerous concerns about the conversion, which they suggested could result in long-term motel "owners" living in rooms under hazardous conditions.

"According to the town attorney's (research) ... it's not a change of use, it's a change of ownership," Town Council Chairman Jeffrey Messer said. "It's not really a Town Council issue; it's a code enforcement issue."

The 90-page report, which has not been released to the public, answers questions raised by the Pine Point neighborhood association more than a month ago after residents learned that the motel had converted to a condominium form of ownership.

Town Manager Ron Owens said last week that he does not believe any units have been sold yet.

According to Owens, Lighthouse Inn owners Peter and Nicholas Truman plan to sell their 22 rooms to private individuals, but the facility will continue to operate only six months a year and obey other restrictions currently in place.

That gives the town no legal grounds to object, Owens said. However, after hearing from Pine Point residents, the Town Council asked

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Owens and Chris Vaniotis, the town attorney, to investigate the group's legal concerns and prepare a report.

"The summary of it is that all the questions were answered, certainly to my satisfaction," Messer said. "I'm not sure if the residents group may agree with that..."

"I don't want the council getting involved in it, at least I will not be," he added.

Pine Point residents raised concerns about parking, residency, who is responsible for the units in the owner's absence and the possibility that cooking apparatus could be installed without town inspection.

"The town will have no enforcement ability over what happens there," group representatives Judy Shirk, Harold Hutchinson, John Thurlow, Elaine Richer and Jack Callahan said in a prepared statement. "It is unreasonable to accept the claim that this operation will continue to be a seasonal motel ... Once the 22 units are sold, owners will chose to rent long term or allow friends and relatives to use the units, or leave them vacant. They will not be fully available to the traveling public ..."

The group said the new owners could easily install kitchens and create a "life safety hazard" that the motel is not equipped for.

"This facility is old, has no sprinkler system, no pull stations, no fire escapes, no egress windows, outdated electrical systems, asbestos sheathing, and no inter-connected smoke alarms wired to an alarm service," the Pine Point group said in its statement. "To permit this change of use is to ignore a significant risk to personal safety."

They said the public should have been notified about the motel owners plans to sell units, and the town should have stepped in to regulate the conversion.

The controversy around the Lighthouse Inn dates back to 2004, when the owners of the motel proposed tearing it down and replacing it with a six-to-eight-unit condominium. The owners later backed off the plan.

Since then, two other motels in the area have converted to apartment buildings, and were approved for year-round use by the Zoning Board. Owens said year-round occupancy of the Lighthouse Inn would constitute a change of use and would require Zoning Board approval, but a mere change in the ownership status of the units, if the owners and guests stay there only six months out of the year, would not.

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