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More work needed on motel conversion rules

By Peggy Roberts (published: May 10, 2007)

SCARBOROUGH – A complex law that would restrict nonconforming motels and hotels from converting to condominiums was tackled Monday night at an Ordinance Committee meeting.

Displeased with the draft ordinance as originally proposed, the committee struggled with defining a set of guidelines that, ironically, would regulate the conversion of a commercial-use property to a residential-use property in what is a residential zone.

“We’re not trying to encourage them to stay motels, but if you’re going to convert there needs to be some oversight,” Town Manager Ron Owens said.

Councilor Patrick O’Reilly said the way the ordinance is crafted, it forces nonconforming motels to remain nonconforming.

“That’s where the rub is for me,” he said. “I just don’t know how we get the correct language to provide for those that have been year-long rental situations for 50, 60 and in some cases, 100 years.”

But Owens stressed the importance of formulating a plan to deal with the problems inherent with converting buildings designed for transient use to permanent, single-family units.

“There need to be guidelines for meeting some minimum housing standards,” he said.

During public comments, Judy Shirk, representing the Pine Point Residents Group, asked the committee to give people time to consider the ramifications of the ordinance. Asking for language that would not be permitted to become a “loophole,” she said each nonconforming motel must be looked at individually.

“One size does not fit all,” she said.

Paul Marchi, Massachusetts resident and owner of the Sun and Sand Motel on King Street and several surrounding lots, said he’s looking at selling the place he’s owned for the past 12 years.

“I’m afraid if I sell the motel, the person (who buys it) won’t make sure it stays the way it is,” he said.

He already rents the eight units, complete with kitchens, year-round and said he’s complied with the town by having yearly inspections and making any required improvements.

“By turning it into condos, it will allow me to have my surrounding parcels and it will stay residential,” he said. “It will stay Pine Point.”

David Aranovitch, who owns The Dunes on East Grand Avenue with his wife, Cheryl, said his property is also rented year-round.

“Our feeling is a conversion from single ownership to condominiums would show no real change,” he said. “If our property goes to a condominium, the highest chance of maintaining would be through that.”

While motel owners gave reasons why their properties should be eligible for conversion, several councilors and members of the public referenced the Lighthouse Inn at Pine Point, saying that it was, perhaps, a different case, citing its small-room sizes and the lack of kitchen facilities.

John Thurlow, president of the Pine Point Residents Group, asked the committee to “consider what’s happening at the Lighthouse motel.”

“Are kitchens being put in as we speak?” Thurlow asked cryptically. “I’d



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like you to consider the uniqueness of (the Lighthouse Inn) as compared to the others.”

Thurlow added that the Lighthouse Inn’s structure occupies more than half of the parcel of land. Peter and Nick Truman, owners of the property, did not attend the meeting.

After two hours of discussion, the committee agreed to meet again for further discussion in a couple of months. It will consult with neighboring towns who are also grappling with this situation and will look at condominium association bylaws to glean suggestions for regulating conversions.

Marchi’s response to the timing: “I’m destined to wash toilets again this summer.”

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