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Hearing draws backers of stricter condo rules

Such a change would be 'unfair,' counters a Scarborough inn owner who plans a conversion.

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SCARBOROUGH — Nick Truman wants to convert rooms in his Lighthouse Inn at Pine Point to condominiums, and he thinks new town rules on the matter would be a waste of time and taxpayer dollars.

Members of the Pine Point Residents Group disagree.

They say the town needs an ordinance change, to ensure conversions don't have negative effects on neighborhoods and the environment.

That core disagreement has brewed for at least two years at Pine Point. It returned Wednesday at a Town Council meeting, during a public hearing on a proposed ordinance change that would offer new guidelines on guest room-to-condominium conversion.

"Our group is not anti-condo," said Jack Callahan, a leader of the neighborhood group. "We're for fair, clear and effective public guidelines."

Town Manager Ron Owens said the town has received several requests to convert guest rooms into condominiums. To address that trend, Owens and town planners in recent months crafted an ordinance they consider a fair solution.

In general, businesses that seek to convert some rooms -- but would remain operating as hotels or motels -- would not fall under town oversight. For those that wish to convert and no longer operate as hotels or motels, plans would be subject to Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board review.

Callahan, one of seven neighbors to speak Wednesday, said 58 residents met last week and agreed as a group to support the ordinance.

Truman said the ordinance would be "grossly unfair" and that the Planning Board has prejudged the issue. Converting guest rooms to condos would not change the tone in the community, he said.

Another neighbor, Dan Wilson, sided with him, saying, "We are the only year-round residents right in that area. We see a finely run operation."

There will be another public hearing and a second reading of the ordinance at the Sept. 5 council meeting, which could include a vote on the issue.

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