

# Short-Term Rentals in Lenox: *January 20, 2018 Public Meeting Summary*



## At a Glance

**What:** The Lenox Short-Term Rental Subcommittee (of the Planning Board) held a third forum to gather input from residents and stakeholders on the topic of Short-Term Rentals. The goal of the forums was to engage a variety of Lenox stakeholders in informed, interactive discussions and dialogs aimed at weighing the benefits and concerns surrounding Short-Term Rentals in our Town, as well as beginning to explore various policy ideas. Residents were provided with an informational presentation and asked to provide feedback on summarized issues and opportunities, and to comment on policy goal statements. The goal of the Short-Term Rental Subcommittee is to gather information and solicit input from the community in order to identify issues and craft local policies to address issues or concerns.

**When:** January 20, 2018 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

**Where:** Lenox Town Hall

**Who:** Approximately 40 attendees were present. Thirty-two (32) signed in at the session. The Subcommittee was represented by Co-Chair Pam Kueber and member Kate McNulty-Vaughan. Land Use Director/Town Planner Gwen Miller, AICP was present. **Note: *Because those who attended the forums were self-selected, the feedback reported in this summary is not necessarily “statistically representative” of the views of all Lenox residents. The forums drew a cross-section of stakeholder types and that the discussions, opinions, and suggestions discussed during the forums surfaced a wide variety of input.***

Community members and stakeholders present included:

- ⇒ Lenox State Representative William “Smitty” Pignatelli
- ⇒ Innkeepers
- ⇒ Homeowners who let out their home or other properties they own for Short-Term Rentals
- ⇒ Homeowners concerned by how Short-Term Rental activity may change their neighborhood
- ⇒ Realtors
- ⇒ Small business owners
- ⇒ Village residents
- ⇒ Cultural institution representatives
- ⇒ Lenox Chamber

**Next Steps:** The input from this session is summarized in this document. Input gathered will be used to guide the Short-Term Rental Subcommittee and Planning Board as they refine information and begin considering regulatory solutions to community concerns. The state is also working on legislation that will influence how Short-Term Rentals are taxed and regulated. The Short-Term Rental Subcommittee will bring suggested policy changes to the Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting in the Spring or early Fall of 2018. In addition to this summary, a supplemental document includes all of the facilitator notes from both meetings.

## A Little Different than November Sessions

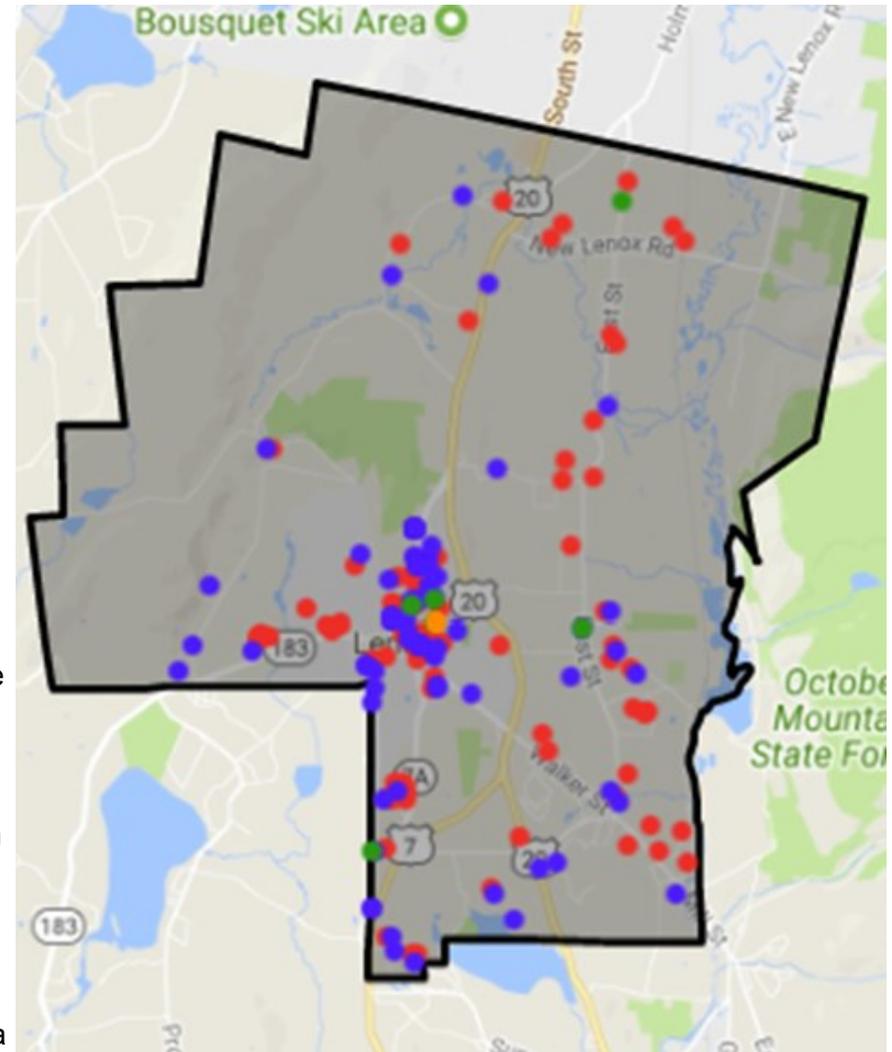
**This meeting** was run differently than the November sessions for two reasons: Many questions during the presentation portion limited time in the second half of the session, and there were not enough facilitators to engage each table of attendees separately, so input and discussion happened as a large group of approximately 32-40 residents. This broader discussion was helpful in soliciting comments from attendees who had yet to speak. During the presentation portion, there were quite a few remarks and comments made, including:

- ⇒ Questions regarding the validity of data provided by HostCompliance
- ⇒ Remarks describing the survey questions from the November-January online survey as “biased” or “leading”
- ⇒ Remarks describing the informational presentation as presenting “opinions” as “facts”

**Staff and Planning Board members** listened to these comments, and recognize the need to remove redundancy in the HostCompliance data and upgrading the subscription level to get precise information. The HostCompliance data is recognized as directional, and the Subcommittee is not seeking to determine how many STRs are “too many”. This is similar to the survey: the survey was developed so as to force residents to choose between extremes. The survey was not intended to be a statistically accurate, perfect survey. It was intended to provide an online venue for residents and property owners who might not have time to attend public meetings, or might not feel comfortable sharing their opinions one on one or with a larger group of town officials. The survey captures the opinions and ideas of residents and property owners, and its results are reviewed as such: another way to gauge support and concerns at the local level regarding Short-Term Rentals as the Short-Term Rental Subcommittee begins to formulate potential zoning regulations.

**The summary wheel of potential issues and opportunities** was critiqued for representing opinion as fact. The Short-Term Rental Subcommittee and staff read a number of professional planning related materials, and popular media material, regarding Short-Term Rentals, and developed this list from that review. A goal of the public meetings held by the Subcommittee was to ask residents and property owners, “What did we miss? What do you think? What should we add? What should we address going forward?” **Lenox isn't the only community with Short-**

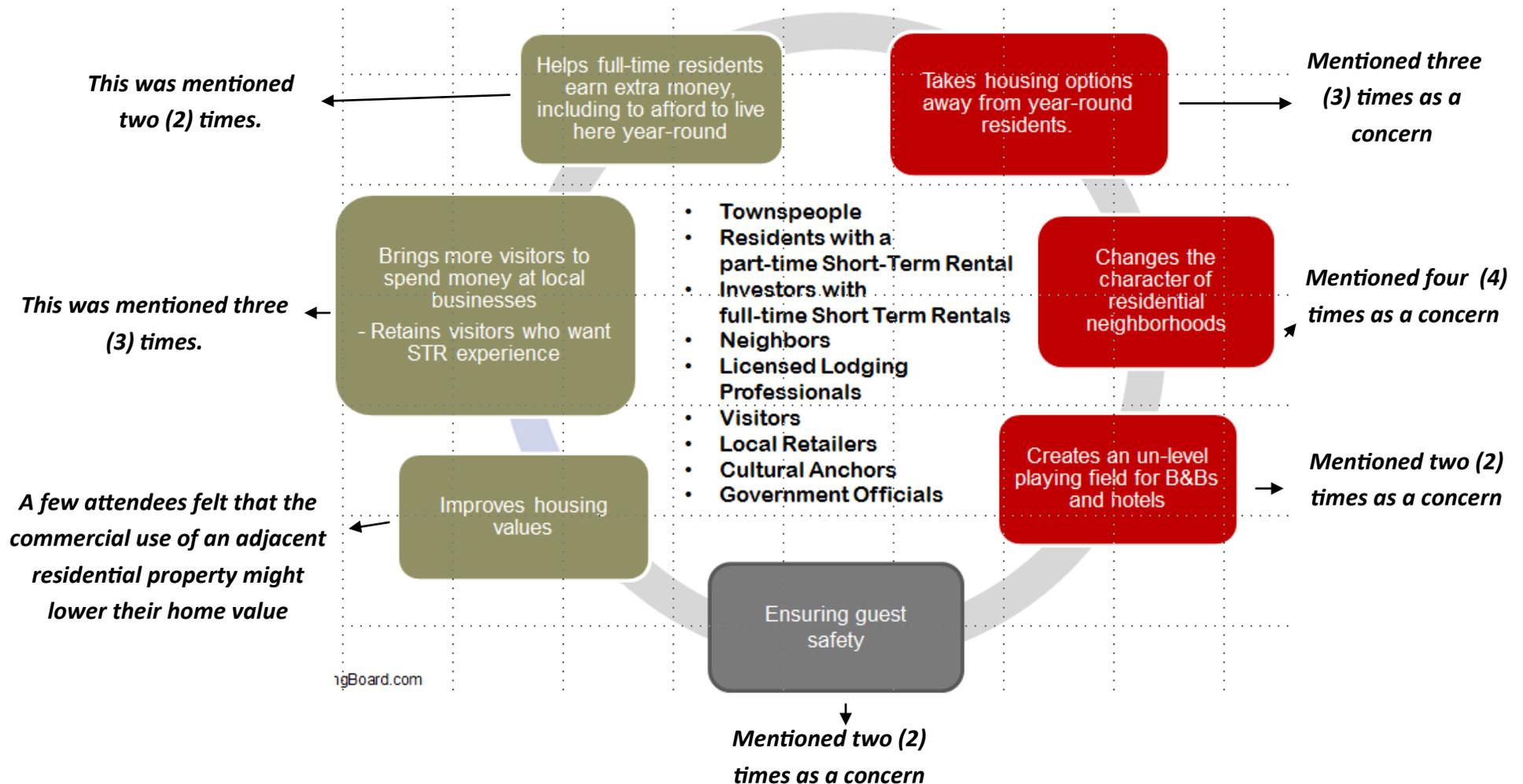
While some listings are counted multiple times, this map from HostCompliance still demonstrates that Short-Term Rental units exist all over Lenox, in every neighborhood.



Source: HostCompliance, 1/16/18

# Potential Issues and Opportunities

Attendees mentioned all of the potential issues and opportunities associated with STRs below during the course of the meeting. Also mentioned was the importance of recognizing the different scenarios in which STRs are operated in Lenox, and addressing the scenarios uniquely.





## Community Input (continued)

- ⇒ Owns a 100 year old house. Airbnb has made a huge difference in our life. Character of neighborhood has been enhance by people who come to stay with me. Judged individually, vetting people. POC and LGBT friendly—lends diversity to neighborhood. Works three jobs to make ends meet. Helps pay child's college – a blessing. Helps pay heating bill. (Works hard for five-star rating.
- ⇒ B&Bs get federal, state and local tax benefits. Town can do other work to promote and provide affordable housing opportunity.
- ⇒ Any given property could be a long-term or a short-term rental. Go for a middle ground.
- ⇒ PB should narrow focus: not building code, not taxes. Affordable housing – barking up the wrong tree. Bias in survey and handout – either/ors – presentation of data not as rigorous as it should be.
- ⇒ Homeowner safety very important: just because it hasn't happened doesn't mean it can't .
- ⇒ In single family residential neighborhood, house across street is being used as a short-term rental. 1,900 s.f. 3 bedroom, sleeping up to 10 people – like a Motel 6. 3 couples recently stay and loved their stay. That's not what we moved into quite one-two bedroom neighborhood. STR renters looking for a lockbox late at night making noise. Advent of internet changed all that. R1A zone is not a B&B zone or commercial zone.
- ⇒ Brothers rent houses. This is one policy issue that he believes requires little policy regulation. Self-regulation is powerful. # people allowed by law. People making ends meet. He is an attorney, says regulation of ownership, not use.
- ⇒ 5 scenarios presented are important and a good start. As head of Chamber of Commerce: Not concerned about trade. What we hear is from our lodging members: need level-playing field. Calls comparing prices. Increase of professional investors – that is what has changed over three years. Personally, value having neighbors I know, can socialize with, and who help each other out. People who rent out for two weeks are very different from professional investors.
- ⇒ Moved here three years ago from college town where rentals are rampant – that town has a noise ordinance. People who do STRs – respect. Wise to have owner on site. Shouldn't be neighbor's call.
- ⇒ Put things into context: different use cases. Implementation: do we have the resources to follow up.

## ***Attendee List (from sign-in sheets , EventBrite registration and walk-ins)***

1. Representative William "Smitty" Pignatelli
2. Jamie Trie
3. Ted Silverman
4. Sushilla?
5. Bill Polk
6. John Nelson
7. Cynthia Brown
8. Andrea Bruce
9. Kelly Brown
10. Rebecca Walsh
11. Jim Harwood
12. Amy LaFave
13. Sandra Hall
14. Richard Newman
15. Angela Lomanto
16. Rob Murray
17. Frank Newton
18. David Sefcik
19. Nancy Sefcik
20. Clarence Fanto
21. Ingrid Taylor
22. Richard Taylor
23. Steve Ball
24. Katherine Keenum
25. Tamara Hickey
26. Suzanne Pelton
27. Susan Foulds
28. Nick Rumin
29. Tim McCaffery
30. Olga Weiss
31. Denise Roszkowski
32. Colin Matthews
33. Joel Williams