

The Barnstable Patriot

Opinion

Will restrictions on short-term rentals hurt tourist economy?

By Nicholas Nowak

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Let's start with what we all agree on: Everybody wants a strong economy, robust tourism, and prosperous local businesses.

After that, things get sticky.

Commercial interests argue for unrestricted, investor-owned, short-term rental "homes" in all our residential neighborhoods. Barnstable will suffer mightily, they say, if we say no to the house next door being used as a hotel, 365 nights per year. Our town planning staff seems to agree, proposing to change zoning law and allow just that.

What follows are facts. Check them out yourself on Google.

Outside of Disney World in Orlando, New York City is the No. 1 tourist destination in the nation. Back in 2016, the state of New York passed a sweeping law that banned homes being flipped into short-term rental, de facto hotels. New York City added more restrictions, including that you be home, physically present with guests.

Last year, New York City had a record-breaking 65.2 million visitors, up from the prior year's record-breaking 62 million.

New York's summer haven, the Hamptons, is a lot like Barnstable. It's made up of diverse villages, year-round residents, weekenders, and lots of tourism. The Hamptons also added extra restrictions: rent your primary residence only, no rentals under two weeks, occupancy by four unrelated adults max.

Hamptons tourism is booming. Growth plans center around transportation infrastructure and convention facilities, not Airbnb and Booking.com.

Now let's go to the other coast.

Short-term rental profiteers had free rein for a time in Los Angeles, a few spots behind New York as a popular tourist destination. But today, you can only short-term-rent your primary residence. LA's iconic Santa Monica oceanfront community passed these "no investor" limits first, in 2015. Last year, Santa Monica had its best revenue year ever.

You get the idea. Must I go on?

Denver is the nation's 13th most popular destination, with a record-breaking 32 million visitors. And let's not forget Hilton Head, Palm Springs, Palm Desert, Tahoe, Miami, New Orleans and Boston, where tourism is shattering records today. All of these destinations have strong, mainstream regulations like the ones Barnstable Watch has proposed. The town's draft is an outlier.

Letting investors turn homes into profit centers doesn't drive tourism. It simply pushes groups of tourists into quiet residential areas and creates conflict.

Let's put homeowners, residential districts, a year-round economy, and our longtime rental traditions (which everyone supports) first.

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