



CAPE COD TIMES

Opinion

Realtors have complicated relationship with rental platforms

By Heather Hunt

Posted Dec 10, 2019 at 3:01 AM

Writing this column pains me.

I come from a family of Realtors and builders. My mother's real estate business put my sisters and me through school. Her car backed out of the driveway early in the morning and returned late at night. She skipped meals and worked weekends. I also remember my family renting summer vacation cottages that my great uncle built on Cape Cod.

But here we are.

On Nov. 20, the CEO of the lobby group Cape Cod & Islands Association of Realtors (CCIAOR) wrote a letter to the editor. It said there are two traditional types of homeowners who rent out their properties: "second-home owners who rent during the summer to defray the cost of homeownership, and owners renting out their future Cape Cod retirement home until they move here permanently."

Upon reading this, my colleagues at BarnstableWatch.com were delighted. We agree, and have always supported these two local rental traditions. This Realtor view also seems to comport with a Cape Cod Times editorial that expressed concern about the proliferation of Airbnb rentals, specifically "investors buying single-family houses and flipping them into pay-per-night motels in residential neighborhoods."

We had also been surprised and delighted weeks earlier with a social media post by the Realtor lobby group. It said the short-term rental market is "rapidly changing." Short-term rentals on the Cape have doubled in three years. Now, Barnstable homeowners in year-round, residential

neighborhoods are getting multiple mailings from Airbnb, Hotels.com, and other platforms urging them to turn their homes into income-producing machines.

Because we support rental traditions and are only concerned with homes used as makeshift hotels, BarnstableWatch.com discussed reaching out to Realtors.

But we still can't shake what happened last summer. In July 2019, CCIAOR adopted a policy that stunned us.

In effect, Realtors said investor-operated commercial Airbnb "homes" are appropriate in residential districts, and zoning laws shouldn't regulate where they belong. The kind of regulation they do support: nuisance-style ordinances.

Let's talk about what a nuisance-driven, complaint-driven system really means.

First, in our experience, and based on a review of town records, enforcement officials will ask for evidence of problems like noise and occupancy violations. So you'll need to photograph your "neighbors," count cars and transport vans, and make contemporaneous notes.

Second, every other place of revolving-door lodging – inns, bed and breakfasts, hotels, motels – is required by the town to have on-site management. Did a Realtor sell you a home in a nice single-family residential district with actual neighbors? Sorry. There will be a new group of unsupervised transients next door soon - and all the time.

Those of us who've been doing it for some time can tell you, this is no way to live.

We believe it's time Barnstable joined other communities, coast-to-coast, from the Hamptons to Monterey, that have banned investors from turning single-family homes into transient Airbnb lodging. Most of these places have also been breaking tourism records, so don't fall for the story that a tourist economy requires hollowed out neighborhoods.

Airbnb has compromised some Realtors who, of course, have an economic interest in the selling and renting of properties. New York City filed suit against a prominent real estate brokerage firm for changing apartment listings into illegal short-term rentals, using fake Airbnb "host" identities,

and pocketing \$21 million. Today, Century 21 has a deal with Airbnb in Paris to get around rules the city enacted to stop investors from ravaging neighborhoods. If it works, the real estate company will pocket seven percent of rental revenue.

To the good members of the CCIAOR: you helped us all find our homes in single-family zoned neighborhoods. Please join us in protecting them.

Heather Hunt lives in Osterville.