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An open letter to the Barnstable Town Council

Michelle Lombard, Marston Mills

Here's my question to this Town Council: If what's happening next to me is not a commercial use of a property in a residential neighborhood, what is? Please read this and answer my question.

I'm an elementary school teacher. Three years ago, I put everything I had into a cute home on a cul-de-sac where I imagined I'd retire someday.

Last year, 2019, the home next door to me changed from a traditional, long-term rental to a short-term rental business.

My fiancé and I never know from day to day who will show up. We've had frat parties and bachelorette weekends. Last week, there was a creepy group that kept the window shades drawn and never went outside; you tell me what that was.

We've also had nice families. Until you live next door to one of these hotels, you'll never know how unnerving it is – how it robs you of the feeling of home. We've gotten to know some police officers, which is not something I had on my bucket list.

According to Barnstable's Assessing Division, the short-term rental business next to me is owned by someone who lives in Shrewsbury. I researched the owner and found that her brother appears to manage it through Silvergate Services, Inc., a short-term vacation rental management LLC that's registered at the investor's address. He's listed as the president.

Go visit Silvergate's website. The company describes itself as "full service co-host management for your short-term vacation rental properties." The business model is plainly to serve investors. I've researched Silvergate, and it appears to have a Cape-and-Islands footprint. The company says it does all the host work: evaluating properties, staging and photographing them, advertising them on the online platforms, communicating with people who've booked, arranging switchover day cleaning, as well as dynamic pricing and revenue optimization for investors.

I'm writing to all of you because, thus far, my town Councilor has only wanted to help me complain about specific, poorly behaved renters. I'm not interested in running neighborhood watch in my once-perfect little cul-de-sac. I'm not interested in filing weekly complaints. And who exactly does one complain to about a state of anxiety? About never knowing who and what just booked next door? About our loss of the peaceful enjoyment of home?

You are voting soon. We are painting the house and sprucing up just in case we need to leave Barnstable, where no street will be spared this. We've heard quite a bit about other residents discussing the need to sue you; everybody invested in homes relying on zoning that did not allow commercial use. For now, we're painting, and it makes me profoundly sad.

We'll be watching your meeting Thursday night on Channel 18. I ask every one of you who will a vote on short-term rental rules to answer my question first: If an absentee investor, Silvergate Services, Inc., and transient vacationers paying for lodging is not a commercial use of a property, what is?