

**Edward & Anne Bowen
121 West Shore Road
New Preston, CT 06777**

March 27, 2022

Washington Zoning Commission

Dear Commissioners:

On Friday, 25 March we became aware of the two letters written by our neighbors to the Commission regarding our home at 121 West Shore Road, Anne's family home since 1982. This home has always been a special family vacation home and we have been renting it out occasionally over the past several years to cover the high costs of maintaining it and to make improvements. We are sorry that the Commission received these complaints from our two neighbors, and we have corrected the substance of their issues by adding additional restrictions to our current listing on VRBO and by adding restrictions to our standard lease. The examples provided by our neighbors were a mixture of legitimate concerns, unusual occurrences, and hyperbole. Most of our renters are families, and we work diligently to prevent these issues from happening by clarifying renter makeup (to the extent allowed by law – age, relatedness, and number of cars). We've asked our neighbors to contact us by cell phone immediately in the future if there are any issues. We will respond quickly to any issues.

We are taking immediate steps to address the legitimate concerns of our neighbors, including:

1. Updated our listing to reduce the number of bedrooms to 3
2. Updated our listing to reduce the maximum number of vehicles to 3
3. Updated our listing to reduce the maximum number of unrelated occupants to 7
4. Explicitly prohibited "events" and eliminated any language suggesting "girls weekends"
5. Emphasized that the theme of the house is family-centered
6. Explicitly prohibited "outdoor noise" and "amplified music" after 9 PM

We would also like to briefly respond to their other broader points.

1. The Connecticut Office of Tourism works to "make tourism a leading economic contributor and a source of pride for Connecticut. The office partners with the Connecticut business community and regional tourism districts to position the state as a prime destination for leisure and business travelers and encourage strategic investment."^a The state government provides branding and marketing support, including their showcase website, CTVisit.com^b, as well as social media and eNewsletters. CTVisit.com has links to individual short-term rentals throughout the state and Litchfield County^c, including listings in Washington. The state is actively encouraging this type of tourism for the benefits it provides to towns to support our restaurants, arts and shops.
2. Hundreds of short-term and long-term vacation rentals have been a large part of the economy of Washington and Lake Waramaug for over 50 years. Technology and pandemic-related changes like remote work have created additional opportunities for the town. Our realtor community that lists and often own rental housing knows the importance of rentals to entice buyers to Washington. Tourists and second homeowners are economic drivers in Washington along with private schools that have family visitor rental needs for admissions tours, settling their children, graduations, and reunions.

3. The majority of residents and small business owners that we speak to are supportive of short-term rentals. Our neighbor at 133 West Shore Road has their friends renting from us for a weekend in September and is very supportive. Our extended neighbors on the opposite side of our home expressed support. They are happy to see us take the rental income and invest it back into the property.
4. Our personal and rental use of our home at 121 West Shore Road does not reduce the availability of affordable housing in Washington. We are not absentee homeowners or corporate investors. Our family has owned this home longer than most of our neighbors have been in Washington. The lake has been our family center for 40 years and we spend significant time in Washington. The revenue from the short-term rentals allows us to afford the high costs of maintenance, utilities, taxes, and renovations.
5. We've executed a series of significant investments over the past 5 years to improve the appearance and safety of the property. This is good for the town, the tax base, and aesthetics for our neighbors. We've used local contractors to complete all of the work, injecting money into the local economy. And we've engaged with local restaurant owners who welcome the additional business from tourism, especially during the hard times of the pandemic.
6. Our vacation home does not undercut local inns and restaurants – the opposite is true. Rental homes are serving a different audience than inns and hotels which are restricted to a couple in a room. Rental homes serve families primarily here to vacation, attend a local wedding, a funeral, a private school event, or serve as temporary housing during an insurance-related repair.
7. Our home does not “environmentally harm the Lake”. We have never had a septic issue nor overflow to the lake. We pump our tank more frequently than recommended. We pump the tank annually out of an abundance of caution. Full-year residents have far more septic use in their homes than we do as our home is typically used less than 120 days a year. Full-time homeowners' tax the lake roads and ground water more than our home.
8. Although the majority of people that we have spoken to are supportive, there is a vocal minority of residents of the R-3 (Lake Waramaug) district of Washington who do not welcome inclusiveness in the use of the lake. The use of terms like “unvetted strangers” in the letters refers to people who are unable to afford to buy a house on the lake and whose presence violates the exclusive nature of West Shore Road. We disagree that only millionaires should be allowed to enjoy a few days of vacation on Lake Waramaug.

Again we are sorry that this neighborly issue ended up before the Commission. We are actively taking steps, including modifying the VRBO listing and our standard lease, to address the legitimate issues. We love our home and the lake; and plan to retire in Washington. In the interim, short term rental income allows us to afford to maintain and improve the home like so many Washingtonians have for as long as we can remember while creating additional tourism opportunities for visitors and the town.

Thank you,

Anne and Ed Bowen



References:

- (a) https://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Content/Tourism/06_About_TourismOffice/About-Tourism-Office
- (b) <https://www.ctvisit.com/>
- (c) <https://www.ctvisit.com/stay/vacation-rentals/search?region%5B5%5D=5>