

ACK•Now responds to short-term rental proposal criticism

To the Editor:

Two weeks ago Curtis Barnes wrote a letter to the editor with thoughts about ACK•Now and our proposed article on short-term rentals. Mr. Barnes acknowledges there's a problem to be solved but thinks ACK•Now as an organization isn't in a position to bring forward an article. I knew Mr. Barnes wasn't right in saying ACK•Now couldn't be behind an article, and checked in with our organization's lawyer. Here are her thoughts:

"I have strong feelings about Mr. Barnes' contention that ACK•Now cannot bring a citizens' petition."

In general, it is not remotely unusual to have a local nonprofit sponsor an article. You have a Nantucket address, employ Nantucket residents, pay rent to a Nantucket landlord, and your mission statement involves solely issues affecting Nantucket. The idea that you are not able to sponsor an article – absent some local bylaw accordingly – is bologna.

Nantucket has no such local bylaw. Thus, it is bound by state law concerning citizens' petitions. That law provides that:

The selectmen shall insert in the warrant for the annual meeting all subjects the insertion of which shall be requested of them in writing by ten or more registered voters of the town and in the warrant for every special town meeting all subjects the insertion of which shall be requested of them in writing by one hundred registered voters or by ten percent of the total number of registered voters of the town, whichever number is the lesser. G.L. c. 39, §10.

Thus, as long as the sponsor has the requisite number of registered voter signatures, it is a valid article required to be included in the warrant."

ACK•Now is an organization advocating for a better quality of life on Nantucket supported by many year-round and summer residents. Our objective isn't to "prevent" all short-term rentals but to place reasonable limits on these businesses operating in residentially-zoned areas before they destroy our community. The reality is year-round housing is vanishing. The island lost 35 percent of the year-round rental stock in eight years: that's 600 year-round rentals that are gone. We will cease to have a community if we don't do something. The economic impact over time will be limited and is certainly a lot less than what investor-owned short-term rentals have cost the island thus far. Business owners are forced to provide housing to attract and retain employees, taxpayers are subsidizing the construction of affordable housing and infrastructure, and residents are paying through the roof for homes to buy or rent, all effectively subsidizing these investors who are operating businesses in residential neighborhoods.

Mr. Barnes made a few good points, and we agree with him that a seven-day minimum could impact year-round residents, especially

ACK•Now is born out of a desire by community members to progress toward a more sustainable future for the island. Nantucket is turning into an island-wide luxury resort. Our proposed bylaw intends to protect against corporations and investors (disguised as owners) deciding Nantucket is the perfect place to open or expand a short-term rental business. Housing is affected, but so are neighborhoods. No one wants to live next door to an investor short-term rental business. Many ask whether this is allowed and how they can regain a quality of life. Meanwhile, real estate is having its best year on record. Sewer, stormwater and water infrastructure are taxed and the island faces numerous environmental challenges. Many Nantucketers know this is happening, and we believe they will support a reasonable solution.

JULIA LINDNER
Executive Director
ACK•Now