

My name is Erika Hall. I have lived in Ledyard since 1978 and attended Ledyard public schools. After graduating from Trinity College in Hartford, I served in the US Peace Corps, and later earned a Master of Public Service degree.

For the last 12 years, I have owned and operated Abbey's Lantern Hill Inn in Ledyard. During its 30 years in business, the inn has earned an excellent reputation and won multiple awards.

You may think I'm here to speak against these proposed rule changes out of self-preservation. After all, if these rule changes pass, it will swing the door wide open for investors and corporations to purchase up homes all over Ledyard for the sole purpose of running short-term rentals or STRs as they are called. The most important reason why I'm speaking tonight is that I fully and truly understand how this will impact the quality of life for so many unwitting residents throughout Ledyard. Some of those unwitting residents may be sitting on this Commission.

Being in the business of having strangers pay to stay in my home for the past 12 years, no one in this room comprehends the ramifications of these proposed changes better than I do. When you provide lodging in Ledyard, the vast majority of guests are here to go to Foxwoods. That's just how it is. While most are respectful and well-behaved, a great many are not.

Countless times over the years, I've had to tell guests being loud and obnoxious, indoors and outdoors, to be quieter. They don't always listen or care. Why? Because they are paying money and feel they are entitled to act however they want.

We clearly state in our policies that our rooms are for two people. Countless guests over the years have shown up with additional people they planned to squeeze into their room, despite the written policies to which they agreed

when they booked. One New Years Eve, we had to evict a group of 16 twenty-somethings having a party in a room. They had checked in as two guests, but later sneaked in the rest right under our noses. As the evening went on, we heard increasingly loud noise and investigated immediately. These parties took over an hour to leave. We had to twice knock on the door and threaten to call the police before we finally got them all out. Because we were on site as resident hosts, the party was stopped and they were evicted before it got too out of hand.

I've had guests bring prostitutes back to the inn. When it was blatantly obvious, I kicked them out immediately. If people have the gall to do this at an inn where the host is onsite, imagine how often it will happen at an STR with no one onsite. We are a casino town and casinos are hot spots for prostitution.

We've had numerous guests stay with criminal records for assault and battery, illegal possession of a handgun, and assaulting an officer. If you're wondering why I know this, it's because when observing a guest's behavior raises alarm bells, I do a search on Google to see what comes up. If it were your home, wouldn't you?

Take my word for it, these scenarios are extremely unpleasant. I deal with them immediately when they occur because I do not want other guests and more importantly, my neighbors to be impacted or endangered. When you're in this business, and especially close to a casino, there are always going to be problematic guests and potentially dangerous guests. You need someone to be onsite to keep eyes and ears on what is going on and respond immediately and effectively. Cameras can record the events that are in view, but they do not actively police a situation. No offsite host is going to sit around watching cameras. The burden of policing the situation is going to fall on neighbors who will then call Ledyard police as they get fed up waiting for a timely response.

Let me turn my attention to the specific case of Airbnb and VRBO. I have listed on Airbnb since 2015 and am a "Superhost" with hundreds of reviews. Many people claim you can easily vet your guests on these hosting platforms. That is not the case. Many Airbnb/VRBO users have few or no reviews. Users with bad reviews can easily open a new account with a new email address, and wipe the slate clean.

In 2019, I listed the entire inn as a rental under the exact terms you are proposing with these changes. I have rejected dozens of inquiries from those planning bachelor and bachelorette parties. But many would-be renters are not forthright with this information. Here's an inquiry I received:

Joe 11:25 AM

Hello! We are organizing a small reunion of 8-12 friends. We don't know who can make it yet, but we do know at least 8 people will be there. We are all in our early thirties (business professionals) and we saw your property and thought it was the perfect escape for all of us to come together. Your house and property are simply spectacular - we hope to be outside most of the time enjoying your 7-acre oasis. We plan on hiking and checking out Watch Hill beach. All of us LOVE nature and feel that your property is the perfect getaway for some much-needed rest and relaxation. Thank you in advance for your consideration, and please let me know if you have any questions. - Joe Davin

I thought this sounded like a wonderful booking. When Joe and his group showed up, it was not at all what he represented. It was a group of guys with kegs. I asked Joe, "Is this a bachelor party?" He replied "Yes". I was irate and reminded him that my listing explicitly stated "no events". Joe never communicated that he intended to host a bachelor party. My house rules on Airbnb specifically state "No Events." Another vital point is guests often do not read or do not care about rules. They will happily misrepresent their intentions. I'm sure some of you have read about the 100-person plus party last week at an Airbnb in Mystic that the Stonington police responded to and called in other departments for back up. As quoted in The Day, "The owner of the home, when contacted by police, indicated there were rules in place barring parties at the home." We can see how well the rules were followed.

What is the benefit to the town of Ledyard and its residents in making these proposed changes? A few more pizzas get sold and the local liquor stores sell more booze? Meanwhile, the amount of trash generated by these whole house rentals will be enormous. In my experience, guests and especially whole house renters generate tremendous amounts of trash and almost never recycle, even if you put recycling bins right in front of them. Trash is paid for by Ledyard taxpayers by the pound.

This board shouldn't pass ill-advised zoning changes because you fear lawsuits from investors who want to put profit ahead of the sanctity of residential neighborhoods.

My mom is a resident of Ledyard and 75 years old. I would be absolutely horrified to think of my mom having to live next to an unhosted STR rental and the nuisance and dangers that would expose her to. She should not have to worry about a continual stream of strangers using a house they have no vested interest in. People who are not in town for a long time, but a good time. She should not have to wait for an absentee owner or property manager to maybe respond and maybe be able to gain control. Mom should not have to call the cops when this absentee property manager fails to respond. We, the citizens of Ledyard, should not have to pay for police enforcement action so someone with money can make more money.

This is not worth the risks. This is not worth the diminished quality of life. This is not worth the added expenses to Ledyard's tax-paying residents. Any person, who owns a home in a residential neighborhood should be entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of their property.