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Wings Neck Residents At Odds With Lighthouse Lane Homeowner

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May 8, 2020

Home / Bourne / Bourne News



Wings Neck Lighthouse on Lighthouse Lane in Pocasset.
GENE M. MARCHAND/ENTERPRISE

The owner of a home on Lighthouse Lane in Wings Neck has run afoul of her neighbors—again—for apparently renting the house. People in the neighborhood have reported that the homeowner has rented her property in defiance of the state's emergency order against nonessential businesses being in operation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Christina Stevens is the owner of 0-1 Lighthouse Lane. For a number of years Ms. Stevens has rented the property for weddings, receptions and special events. She is currently under a Barnstable Superior Court injunction prohibiting her from renting the property for special events. Residents also argue that Governor Charles D. Baker Jr.'s emergency order equally forbids her from any kind of rental of the property.

The issue was brought to the attention of Bourne town officials and referred to Assistant Town Administrator Glenn D. Cannon. In an email to Mr. Cannon, Lighthouse Point Association president James F. Molloy, a resident of Westview Street, asked for advice on what to do about Ms. Stevens continuing to rent "despite Governor Baker's March 31st order banning all such short term rentals during the ongoing COVID19 crisis."

"We are particularly concerned as most of the residents who also reside there and are sheltering in place are elderly and thus at a high risk for serious complications should they contract COVID-19," Mr. Molloy wrote.

A check of Ms. Stevens's website, wingsnecklighthouse.org, shows that entire weeks and weekends this month have been booked. The website also does not feature any disclaimer announcing closure and inability to offer accommodations due to COVID-19. Mr. Molloy requested that "swift action be taken to stop such activities and enforce Governor Baker's orders."

In an emailed response to Mr. Molloy, Mr. Cannon said staff in his office spoke with Ms. Stevens about people staying at the Lighthouse Lane property. Ms. Stevens verified that the people seen staying at the house were friends of hers, not renters, Mr. Cannon said.

"The owner informed us that the property is NOT rented and that all bookings have been cancelled through July," Mr. Cannon said.

Mr. Cannon said the issue was referred to the state Department of Labor Standards in Boston. The department referred the situation back to the town, specifically health agent Terri A. Guarino, Mr. Cannon said. Ms. Guarino reached out to Ms. Stevens, who reiterated that she was not renting out her property.

Despite Ms. Stevens's assurances to town officials, Kerri M. Cronin of Westview Street said she was told by people staying at Ms. Stevens's property that they were, in fact, renting. Ms. Cronin recalled speaking with a man in the last week of April who refuted Ms. Stevens's claim. Other

residents, Ms. Cronin said, spoke with different groups staying at the house, who also said there were renters.

“People just seemed to be coming and going, couples, families, different people,” she said.

Ms. Cronin added that there was indication during her conversation with the gentleman that he was not at all familiar with Ms. Stevens, or even knew her name. He said only that he was “renting up at the lighthouse,” Ms. Cronin said.

“He didn’t mention her. If it were me, I would say that I’m renting from a friend,” she said.

Paula Meridan of Wings Neck said Ms. Stevens is clearly breaking the law. Ms. Meridan said she has seen people coming and going from the house, and noted that the lighthouse’s website shows it being booked for May.

“No one in all of Cape Cod can rent their properties out on a daily basis,” Ms. Meridan said. “I know that because I’m a real estate agent. She’s breaking the law.”

Mr. Cannon said no one from his office has visited the Lighthouse Lane home to speak with anyone staying there and determine if they are renting.

It is the latest chapter in the ongoing tussle on Wings Neck over rental of the 0-1 Lighthouse Lane property. Residents have complained to the town about the disruption to their neighborhood caused by her customers. Neighbors argued that she was conducting a business in a residential-zoned area. The zoning board of appeals agreed with them.

In January 2013 former Bourne building inspector Roger M. Laporte issued a cease-and-desist order to Ms. Stevens, citing an earlier land court ruling that the use of property for weddings is not allowed under current zoning.

Ms. Stevens ignored the order from Mr. Laporte and did not pursue an appeal through the board of appeals. She instead continued to hold functions at her property. Her attorneys argued that holding weddings, receptions and other functions on the property was not a commercial use, but rather an accessory use, which is allowable in a residential area under town zoning regulations.

In April 2016 the board of selectmen struck a deal with Ms. Stevens that allowed her to hold no more than four functions on her property, and only from May to September. The agreement also placed numerous restrictions on how the events could be conducted, including the number of guests, hours of operation and a police detail requirement, depending on the number of attendees.

In September 2016 the board of appeals took exception to the selectmen agreeing to such a deal and voted in favor of rescinding it. Appeals board members said they felt that the selectmen had overstepped their authority in the matter.

Ms. Stevens filed an appeal of the board of appeals vote and continued to hold events on her Lighthouse Lane property, angering her neighbors. In November 2018 Barnstable Superior Court ruled in favor of the board of appeals and against Ms. Stevens. The following month she filed yet another appeal, this one of the superior court's ruling.

In June 2019 Barnstable Superior Court issued an injunction against Ms. Stevens to prevent her from holding special events. That injunction was requested by Mr. Molloy. It was put in force while Ms. Stevens's appeal of the superior court ruling against her was adjudicated.

Town Counsel Robert S. Troy said oral arguments relative to Ms. Stevens's appeal were heard at the Appeals Court in Boston on February 13. No decision has been announced yet. The superior court ruling against Ms. Stevens remains in effect until some other ruling or decision is reached, Mr. Troy said.

Mr. Troy also said that, since the superior court ruling is in effect, the town has no action to take until a complaint has been filed by the residents with Bourne Building Inspector Kenneth Murphy.