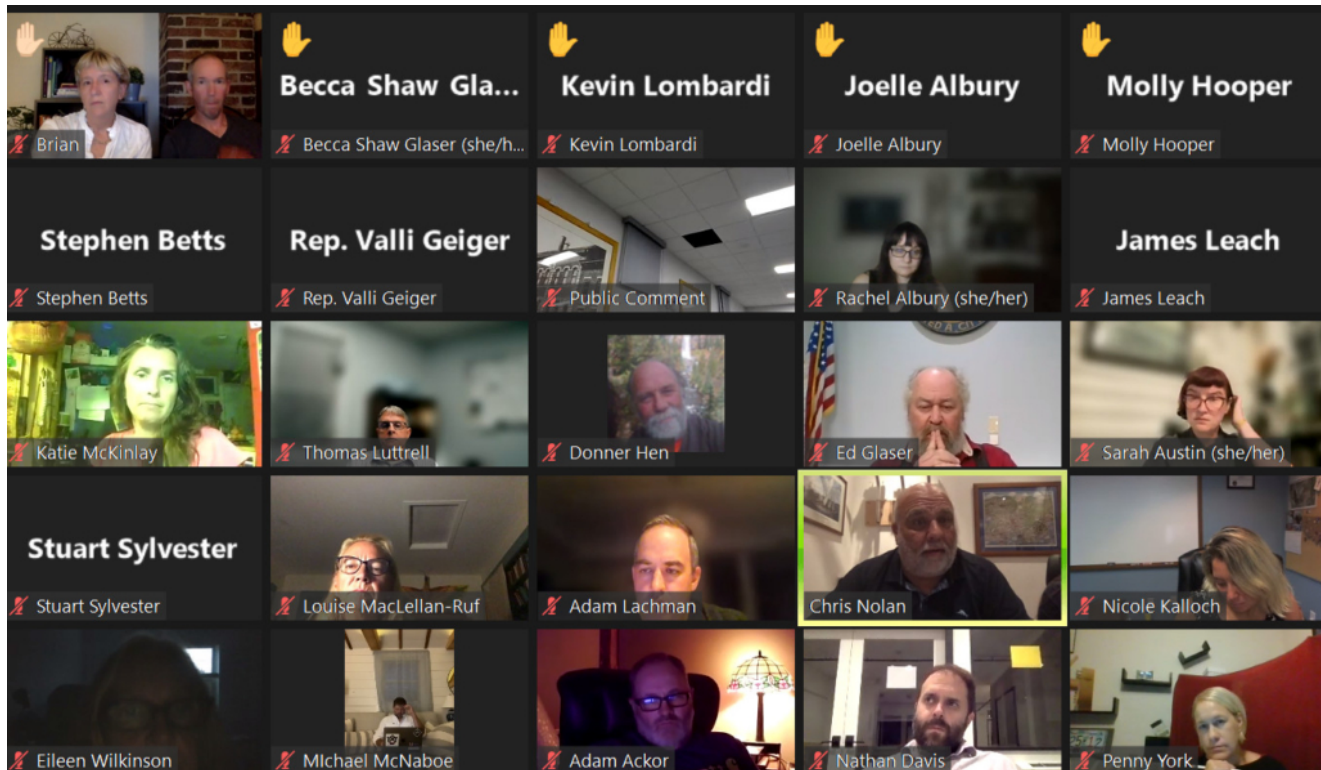


Rockland Council nixes short-term rental ban

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By Stephen Betts Reporter: Courier-Gazette

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ROCKLAND — For more than two hours, 31 people spoke out Monday evening, Sept. 12, on a proposal to prohibit non-owner occupied short-term rentals as of 2025.

In the end, Councilors voted 4-1 at its meeting to indefinitely postpone the proposed ordinance put forth by Mayor Ed Glaser. Glaser was the lone vote to keep the proposal alive.

Most of the speakers were in opposition to the proposal, with many of them owners of such properties or those involved in property management. Many of the speakers were not Rockland residents but owned properties in the city.

Former City Councilor and former Code Enforcement Officer Adam Ackor reiterated his opposition to the proposed ban on non-owner occupied short-term rentals in most residential zones. Ackor voted against the initial cap the city set on such rentals in February 2018.

“At the core, this is a major overreach of city government into our lives,” Ackor said.

He said it was virtually impossible for the city to enforce such an ordinance. He urged the council to drop the effort and instead look at other ways to provide affordable housing.

Chris Nolan, who owns four houses on the Samoset Road and rents out some of them as short-term rentals, said if he was not able to rent them short term, they would not become affordable housing. He said they would likely be bought by people who would turn them into seasonal homes.

Jennifer Maynard said the management of short-term rentals provides a lot of employment in Rockland.

Reilly Harvey of Owls Head said it was incredibly unethical to take away the ability of short-term rental owners to continue that work after they made large investments in properties.

Malin Bengtsson of Colorado said she was not a large corporate investor or land speculator but has a short-term rental as a way to maintain the modest cottage-type home she has in Rockland. She said a ban would not make a dent in the affordable housing crisis. She talked about how she spends money in Rockland to maintain the home.

James Leach, who operates a property management business, said the ordinance might provide a few homes at best but they would not be affordable. He said the homes would be out of reach for people who need a home.

Leach pointed out for the first eight months of 2022, there have been 100 homes sold in Rockland with 65 percent being bought from people out-of-state. And most of the buyers are older people who are either retiring here or buying a vacation home.

Leach said high property taxes are forcing people out of their homes.

“We are fooling ourselves if we believe this amendment will create affordable housing in any way,” Leach said.

Leach urged the city to bring together people including landlords and the development director to look at ways to generate more housing. He said he fears for what will happen in Rockland in another five to 10 years if more housing is not created for workers.

Eileen Wilkinson said Rockland has a housing, income, and education problem. She said Rockland needs federal help to provide additional housing.

“There is no way people here can rent an apartment at an affordable level,” she said. “We don’t have the jobs to support the cost of housing.”

Others who spoke, however, supported the ban.

State Rep. Valli Geiger, D-Rockland, and a former city councilor who voted for the cap on non-owner occupied short-term rentals in 2018, was one of those supporting the ban. She said the annual permits given by the city were never promised as permanent permits to operate such rentals.

She said Rockland has always been a year-round community but that version of Rockland is at risk because of the loss of long-term housing.

Gayle Albury of Rockland said without a working class that can afford to live in Rockland, the community will be hollowed out. She said the city needs to address affordable housing and good jobs.

Becca Shaw Glaser also voiced support for the ban and talked about the situation many people face with the lack of housing with some living in tents or hotels. Glaser moved out of Rockland two years ago and said she would like to return to Rockland in a few years.

“I hope Rockland won’t be completely a luxury seaside resort populated exclusively by wealthy retirees and yuppie hipsters,” she said.

She said while the City Council has little ability to create more affordable housing, restricting short-term rentals would be one step.

After the more than two hours of public comment, Councilors took their turn to talk about the proposal before postponing it indefinitely.

Councilor Louise MacLellan-Ruf sharply criticized the mayor for proposing it and the two other councilors — Nate Davis and Sarah Austin — who were aware this proposal was being put forward before it was formally placed on the agenda. She said this showed a complete lack of process with no community discussion or vetting by the full council.

She said she was embarrassed by the actions of the council. She said this was an overreach.

“I hope we are able to have a council in November that truly understands process and not their own agenda, not their own social issues,” MacLellan said.

Councilor Sarah Austin pointed out the process is for an item to be placed on the agenda, an initial vote held and then a workshop can be held or the matter referred to a particular committee such as the comprehensive planning commission. After an initial vote, a formal public hearing is also held and additional workshops if needed before a final vote is held.

This ordinance proposal was first submitted for the agenda Sept. 1 and was publicized that day online on VillageSoup. The Council held an agenda setting meeting Sept. 7 and the first reading of the ordinance was Sept. 12.

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