

Town of Northumberland Zoning Board of Appeals
Wednesday,
December 4, 2024 7:00 pm
Subject to Correction by Zoning Board
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Zoning Board Members Present: Maureen Leerkes, Paul Becker, Christopher McMahon,

Zoning Board Members Absent: Sarah Mojzer, Vice Chairperson and Chairman Mark Boyce
Carl Harrison and Anne Haag

Town Employees Present: Michael Terry, Code Enforcement and Tia
Kilburn, Zoning Board Clerk

Quorum Established

Acting Chair Maureen Leerkes called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM
All in attendance stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Acting Chair Leerkes announced the first item on the agenda **Application #: 0011-24, Use Variance, Airbnb, 768 West River Rd** in the agricultural zone, **Nicholas LaFountain and Emily Getty**

The applicants approached the Board and explained the application, Mr. LaFountain reviewed / discussed the packet they submitted with the application, he stated they purchased the property in 2017, at that time it was a dilapidated property that needed a lot of work, there are several structures on the property including the structure they are going to discuss tonight, they call the cottage. When they bought the property in 2017 they had big dreams and wanted to renovate it the right way and do things correctly architecturally and preserve the historic structure, the house was built around 1860. They worked hard and after the purchase they did not have monetary means to do the renovation, there was the cottage on the property and that is what they renovated and then saved enough money to do a full renovation on the main house.

Mr. LaFountain stated they have a great relationship with the neighbors, since they have renovated, they have many bicyclists and runners, motorcyclist that come to the property to admire what they have done to the property. He stated in the packet there are older photos of the property prior to renovations, he said there were many more structures on the property where the barns are now. Ms. Getty stated it was part of the Austin farm, Austin Road meets West River Rd, and they are across from Austin Road. Mr. LaFountain said the packet includes a survey that they had done in 2017 that shows the additional structures, he included a drone shot he took of the property showing the location of the main house, playground in the backyard, the driveway and the cottage they are talking about. The cottage is in pretty close proximity to the house, when they have guests on the property, they feel they are with them and not just renting the property out.

He said besides renovations they have done improvements on the property, new septic, new driveway for safer access to the road, new electrical and new landscaping. Ms. Getty added they basically gutted it and preserved all the old beams in the interior, they tried to save what was old and beautiful about it. Mr. LaFountain stated the packet shows before and after pictures of the cottage, totally gutted and renovated, there are before and after exterior photos, some history of it there are a lot of windows on the south side and there was an old slate roof, entrances on the 1st floor and 2nd floor and he pointed out the photos now after being completely renovated. There is base molding, wainscoting, chair-rail, windows and molding around the windows, it is certainly an habitable structure. There was electrical in the structure, but it was not hidden, it was just running up the walls, it was all lath and plaster, Mr. LaFountain showed photos of the interior now.

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Ms. Getty stated the primary use of the structure is when their family visits, it is nice to have the structure so they can have their own space. They had renovated the space and were able to live in it before they completed the renovation of the full property. She stated they are intentional about managing it responsibly, they greet their guests, everyone gets an individual code, they have significant house rules, they have a liability waiver that is integrated into those rules because they are on the river and they need to be intentional about that, they are trying NOT to attract people that want to come and just have a Saratoga party, that is not what this space is, it is quite, secluded away from the hub-bub of town, but if you want to go into town you have that option. She stated they have many repeat guests including a woman that has a daughter studying at Skidmore, a professional musician, he stays when he is here with the Philadelphia Orchestra, he is a hornist, and his wife is a flutist. The neighbors don't have a guest room, so before Thanksgiving their parents stayed there. Ms. Getty reiterated they are trying to be intentional, trying to attract the right type of guests, being smart about having the right rules, it is their space too so they are keeping it within reason.

Acting Chair, Leerkes asked how many occupants it can hold, Mr. LaFountain stated it is one bedroom, so it is two, Ms. Getty added there is a queen size bed downstairs. Acting Chair Leerkes asked about parking, Ms. Getty indicated in a photo where there are 3 parking spaces available, Mr. LaFountain stated they included a circular driveway with the landscaping, they keep people from parking in the circle and have people park in the spaces so when they are exiting the driveway they can go around the circle and exit to the road in a safe manner.

Mr. Becker asked Mr. Terry if when they purchased the property there was already a second residence, Mr. Terry stated yes, it appears somebody was staying there so this is different from the other variances they have had, when they built this building, it was permitted, built with permits while they were saving up for the main house. Mr. Becker stated he assumes since they have done the renovations the tax assessment has increased, Mr. LaFountain agreed.

Acting Chair Leerkes asked how long the guests normally stay, Ms. Getty replied it depends, in the summer they have people that come and stay for an extended weekend or a week, Acting Chair Leerkes asked if they rent for a month at a time, Ms. Getty stated it is on Airbnb, so if it is open and someone wants to come stay for a month there is a discount, but they don't have many people that want to do that.

Acting Chair Leerkes asked Mr. Terry if they are getting into something different, Mr. Terry replied no, because this is probably the best example of what they have for a bed and breakfast in Town, if you look at it, it is a bed and breakfast, we do have bed and breakfast in the zoning, he is not going after Airbnb's or short term rentals, the thing is that there are two buildings on one lot, that is the only box that doesn't check for the bed and breakfast in the zoning so that is why they are here.

Acting Chair Leerkes asked if they had many wintertime rentals, Ms. Getty replied not really, Mr. LaFountain stated they do keep it heated through the winter, Ms. Getty added there may be a few people that want to do some ice fishing or winter carnival week attracts a few people or chowder fest in Saratoga, she added their regular base is an older crowd, Mr. LaFountain stated their guests are nice people, they still have to drive 20 minutes to Saratoga and he feels most of the draw to the area is Lake George or Saratoga so they still have to drive a distance to get there. Ms. Getty stated they had people come for the eclipse; they were shorter stays than normal. Ms. Getty stated she makes it clear in their listing they are close to Saratoga, but they are not in Town, and she has quiet hours from 10 pm to 6 am for their neighbors and them because they are right next door. She stated if she were an Airbnb renter it would deter her if she wanted to have a party, she said they get people from cities that just want a quiet weekend where they can sleep. Mr. LaFountain stated the longest renter was the hornist with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

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Acting Chair Leerkes asked Mr. Terry if there was anything else they should be asking, Mr. Terry said no, he reiterated this one is probably one of the most complete applications they have had because it was built with permits, it is not like he has to go in after and look at things, the only thing that doesn't click in zoning for the bed and breakfast is it is not connected to the house but it is just a stones throw from the house so it's owner occupied.

Acting Chair Leerkes asked if the Board had any other questions, Mr. McMahon stated it sounds good, it is because it is two separate structures on the property, Mr. Terry agreed. Acting Chair Leerkes asked if there were a motion to accept the application and schedule a public hearing.

Mr. McMahon made a motion to accept application #; 0011-24 and schedule a public hearing,
Mr. Becker 2nd the motion,
All in attendance unanimously agreed.

Acting Chair Leerkes explained the public hearing will be scheduled for January 8th, the Clerk will send out letters to the neighbors and publish notice. Mr. LaFountain asked if they had to create the letters, the Clerk interjected she would do that. Mr. LaFountain asked if there were different members on the 8th if they should do a different or a presentation for them, Acting Chair Leerkes explained they will be asked to come up and explain the application, then the Board will asked if the audience has any questions or comments, she said there will be different Board members here and they may have questions but she felt this presentation was through enough, she suggested they don't get nervous about the public hearing, it is procedural.

Acting Chair Leerkes stated there was no old business for the Board, she stated there are meeting minutes for October, she asked if there were corrections, none were noted.

Acting Chair Leerkes made a motion to accept the meeting minutes for October as submitted,
Mr. McMahon 2nd the motion,
All in attendance unanimously agreed.

Acting Chair Leerkes made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 pm,
Mr. McMahon 2nd the motion,
All in attendance unanimously agreed.

Respectfully submitted,
Tia Kilburn, Zoning Board Clerk