

October 14, 2018

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you are enjoying (or at least surviving) the excitement and drama the Red Sox are bringing into our homes. This week's letter will discuss regulation of student housing and short term rentals, the school bus driver strike and the teacher union's "work to rule" program.

Last Tuesday afternoon, a subcommittee of the City Plan Commission met to review a proposed ordinance to regulate student housing. The ordinance proposed allowing property owners to rent up to three students in every residential unit as a matter of right, and allowing owners the opportunity to apply for a special use permit that would allow up to five students per unit, depending on the number of bedrooms it contains. The new regulation would apply to all housing (multifamily) in all zones. Neighbors/residents at the meeting advocated for a strict 3 student per unit limit, while property owners objected to any limit below the actual number of bedrooms in the housing in question, as well as the need to apply for permission. Some spoke of the opportunity to gain further help from colleges and universities to regulate student behavior without enacting any regulation of property owners. The discussion continued at a neighborhood meeting on Wednesday night. The Planning Department will take this feedback into consideration before presenting a revised ordinance to the City Plan subcommittee in several weeks.

Also at Wednesday's neighborhood meeting, Robert Azar of the Planning Department described the Department's approach to regulating short term rentals, such as AirBnb. Mr. Azar described three categories of short-term rentals. The first (and lowest impact) is when a host stays in their home while renting out a room to visitor. The second is when a host rents out their entire home on a periodic basis while still keeping their home as their primary residence. The third is when the host is an absentee, and a steady stream of guests comes and goes. The Planning Department will propose permitting the first category to continue unregulated, while banning the third category completely. Hosts in the middle category will apply for and obtain a one-year special use permit to operate, with the opportunity to revoke the permit in the event of being a "bad neighbor." There are other details to work out, such as whether there is an overall cap on the number of nights rented out per year, and/or whether hosts will have an initial probationary period before getting their first one-year permit. The Planning Department expects to present a draft proposal at the City Plan Commission's next meeting on Tuesday, October 16 at 4:45 p.m. at 444 Westminster Street.

Over the past several weeks, our public school children have faced two significant stresses, namely a strike by school bus drivers and a decision by the teachers' union to "work to rule," under which the union directs teachers not to perform any work beyond the specific tasks spelled out in the contract. Many parents signed a petition expressing their concerns about these stresses, and Councilwoman LaFortune and I met with a group of them last weekend to discuss ways they can advocate for their children. Twelve years ago, parents formed the East Side Public Education Coalition to improve Nathan Bishop Middle School, and continued for several years to work with officials to improve public education. It would be wonderful if parents used the current challenges to form a new organization for this purpose. We hope to announce a public meeting soon to discuss the "work to rule" issue to provide the parents with a platform to build a new organization.

Sincerely,

