

**REPORT OF THE PLANNING BOARD
REGARDING AN INCREASE IN
THE MAXIMUM SIZE OF GUEST HOUSES**

BACKGROUND

- The Guest House bylaw was introduced in 1976 to enable residents (a) to have a dwelling on their property to occupy while renting out their principal dwelling during the summer season, or (b) to rent out the Guest House during the summer season. It was hoped that the Guest House bylaw would help families make ends meet and enable them to afford a mortgage. An additional purpose of the bylaw was to allow additional space for family members to stay while visiting. The Guest House bylaw thus allows both guests and tenants (subject to some restrictions) to occupy a Guest House.
- Bylaw requirements for a Guest House include: the need to obtain a special permit, a lot with a minimum of 3 acres, a 5-year waiting period, and an 800sq' limit.
- There are currently 1319 principal dwellings, and 235 (18%) have Guest Houses. The existing Guest House limit of 800sq' can accommodate 2 small bedrooms (or 1 large bedroom), 1 bathroom, a kitchen and a living area.
- 75% of Chilmark homes are used only seasonally. Typically, these owners do not move to their guesthouse and rent out the principal dwelling, nor do they typically rent out their Guest House.
- Guest House sizes in Island Towns are limited as follows:
 - ✓ Aquinnah: no size limit, but aggregate footprint of all structures limited to 2000sq' (except with special permit)
 - ✓ Chilmark: 800sq' limit
 - ✓ Edgartown: 900sq' limit, subject to restrictions
 - ✓ Oak Bluffs: 750sq' limit on floor space
 - ✓ Tisbury: limited to ½ of principal dwelling size, but also limited to 600-800sq' in certain zones
 - ✓ West Tisbury: 1000sq' limit

REASONS TO SUPPORT AN INCREASE IN THE GUEST HOUSE SIZE LIMIT

- **People want larger living areas**

The average house size in Chilmark is larger today than when the Guest House bylaw initially passed as people are looking for larger indoor living space. For example, the average size of a Chilmark house built before 2000 is 2216sq', whereas the average size of a Chilmark house built after 2000 is 3118sq'. An increase in the size of a Guest House would be consistent with this trend and might better meet changing demands for increased living space.
- **Increased Guest House living area might provide a convenience benefit to property owners**

A larger Guest House might benefit both (a) year-rounders, who desire a more spacious dwelling to move into for the summer; and (b) seasonal residents (as well as year-rounders) who want to accommodate their guests in a more spacious Guest House.
- **The Big House bylaw provides protection against overdevelopment and allows owner flexibility**

The Big House bylaw sets an upper limit on total living area. Increasing the size of a Guest House would give property owners greater flexibility as to how they allocate living area between their structures.

- **Larger Guest Houses might increase rental income**

For year-rounders and seasonal owners alike, larger Guest Houses might generate increased rental income. In addition, more spacious rental accommodation might increase the desirability of Chilmark properties for short-term rental accommodation through VRBO and Airbnb, further increasing rental income potential.

- **Larger Guest Houses might increase the availability of year-round housing**

A larger Guest House might be deemed more convenient for year-round occupancy. If an owner is willing to rent a Guest House on a year-round basis, that Guest House might assist in mitigating the Island's year-round housing shortage.

- **Increasing Guest House size might facilitate a more income-diverse population**

A property with a Guest House larger than 800sq' might therefore have a reduced main house size (to comply with the Big House bylaw). This might result in 2 more modest sized houses, possibly attracting more income-diverse tenants.

Larger Guest Houses will shift the tax burden to those with larger Guest Houses

Property owners who take advantage of a larger Guest House limit might see a greater increase in the assessed value of their property and, accordingly, their proportionate share of the tax burden.

REASONS TO KEEP THE CURRENT GUEST HOUSE SIZE LIMIT

- **Larger Guest Houses changes 3-acre standard zoning to, in effect, 1½-acre zoning**

Of the 1319 primary dwellings in Chilmark, approximately 372, or 28%, are under 1500sq'. If the maximum size of a Guest House were increased to 1200sq', these larger Guest Houses would come to resemble main houses in size. The result would be essentially two houses on a 3-acre parcel or, in essence, 1½-acre zoning.

- **Larger Guest Houses look more like second primary dwellings**

Guest Houses were intended to be a structure "accessory" to the principal dwelling – this is explicit in the Guest House bylaw. Increasing the maximum size would make Guest Houses appear to be less of an accessory structure and more like a second primary dwelling.

- **Larger Guest Houses might increase building density**

As the number of larger structures increases, so too does the appearance of greater density.

- **Larger Guest Houses might increase population density**

A larger Guest House can accommodate more occupants (with no corresponding decrease in the number of occupants in the principal dwelling) and might promote increased Guest House usage (due to added convenience/capacity). In addition, more spacious rental accommodation might increase the desirability of Chilmark properties for short-term rental accommodation through VRBO and Airbnb, further increasing population levels and adverse environmental impacts.

- **Larger Guest Houses might have adverse environmental impacts**

The potential population increase might adversely impact:

- ✓ infrastructure capacity – public and private roads, beaches, and other public services;
- ✓ the number of cars/traffic;
- ✓ energy consumption;
- ✓ noise, pollution, and other environmental considerations; and
- ✓ the nitrogen loading in the Town's ponds.

- **Increasing Guest House size is not likely to address affordable housing needs**

Guest Houses do not currently mitigate the Town's affordable housing needs. Increasing the size of Guest Houses is not likely to change this paradigm. In fact, 85% of Islanders working with the Dukes County Regional Housing Authority are seeking to rent (or are now occupying) 1 or 2 bedroom houses, a need which can be satisfied with the current 800sq' limit.

- **Increasing Guest House size may not be the most effective way to enable family members to remain in Chilmark**

In 2015, the Town passed the Accessory Apartment bylaw specifically to enable family members to live in Chilmark on a year-round basis. Amending the Accessory Apartment bylaw to increase the size of an Accessory Apartment from 800sq' to an appropriately larger number, might better meet the needs of year-round family members without the negative and possibly unanticipated consequences of increasing the Guest House size. (Since the provisions of the Accessory Apartment bylaw can also be applied to affordable housing, increasing the size allowable for an Accessory Apartment would also address affordable housing needs.)

- **Increasing Guest House size might drive up housing prices and further encourage property acquisition as an investment**

The potential for a Guest House larger than 800sq' might increase the overall value of property and thereby drive up the price of Chilmark property. In addition, the increased rental revenue from a larger Guest House might motivate people to acquire property solely as an investment. An absentee landlord could maximize their investment return with rental income from the principal dwelling and a larger Guest House.

- **West Tisbury's increase in Guest House size may not be a model for Chilmark**

West Tisbury's Guest House size increase from 800sq' to 1000sq' was only just passed in 2015. It is too early to tell what the consequences (intended and unintended) are at this early date.

- **Current zoning appears to be working well – why change it?**

Although the current Guest House zoning bylaw might not be perfect, it is working well to allow accessory structures while preserving the character of the Town.