

To the Raymond Planning Board,

I have been a resident of Raymond for over 40 years. My husband's family is one of the founders of Raymond and have owned property in this town since 1783 in various parts of East Raymond. The connection between its residents and town government has always had challenges but it seems it has been particularly dismissive to the residents of Raymond over the past several years..

I have been on a journey with the Town over the commercial use of the property next to me since early 2019. In June, it will be 6 years that I have been trying to get a problem addressed and now it resides with this Planning Board.

My neighbors starting advertising their property in the Residential Zone as a Barn/Wedding Event Revenue for private events in 2018. Their Facebook page, Instagram and other social media accounts advertise it as The Roma Farm, a seasonal vacation rental for private events for weddings, parties, gatherings, etc. There are no bedrooms for rent or any overnight stays. It is strictly a party venue.

In early 2019, the Roma's applied to the Town for a business license. They were refused by the CEO, Scott Dvorak, because the business they were asking to get a license for was not a type of commercial business that was allowed in a Residential Zone, only in commercial zoned areas. They were told by the CEO and town planner that they would have to seek a Conditional Use from the Zoning Board of Appeals to approve their business plan and insure that what they were requesting aligned with an approved Conditional Use. Their application indicated they planned to run this event venue annually from June through October and would have between 40-150 guests per event. After hiring a Land Use attorney to review the Conditional Use ordinance and the Comprehensive plan, I presented a case against allowing the Conditional Use for the Barn/Wedding Venue at the Roma Farm. In July 2019, the Zoning Board of Appeals heard the request for Conditional Use and denied it based on the fact that this type of business did NOT meet the requirements of a Conditional Use in the Rural Residential Zone.

The Roma's were sent a denial letter stating why they were denied and given 45 days to appeal to Superior Court. They did not appeal. They kept advertising on social media. In January 2020, Mr. Dvorak sent the Roma's another letter reminding them that they had been denied by the ZBA and that they were still advertising and if events continued they would be in violation of the ZBA decision and a Notice of Violation and fine would be imposed, and further court action could be possible.

In 2020, the pandemic stalled any large gatherings in the state for several months, however, by the fall, the Roma's were holding political rally for Sarah Gideon, with

large tent, hundreds of people. It was covered by national news, as I saw it on CNN that evening.

By summer of 2021, the Roma's were back in full swing holding events. Now, Alex Sirois is the new CEO for Raymond and Scott Dvorak had moved on. I brought the activities to Alex's attention and he claimed a couple of things. He did not work as the CEO on the weekends so it would be hard for him to witness the activities and since the Roma's refer to it as a vacation rental or seasonal rental and Raymond has **no rental ordinances** it would be impossible for him to enforce. My attorney thought this approach was wrong and eventually was allowed to connect with the town attorney, Phil Sauer. They concluded that the issue was NOT a rental issue but a USE VIOLATION and they should receive a violation notice. Nothing happened, as I later found out that Mr. Sirois worked as a wedding DJ on the weekends and therefore had a conflict of interest in the matter that he never disclosed. After weddings and other events that year, I went to members of town leadership in early 2022, as the advertising for the Roma Farm was continuing as well as events. I met with the town manager, CEO, Fire Chief and the Fire Inspector to find out what had changed with the Roma's denial status that they were now allowed to hold these commercial events. (The Fire Inspector had sent a letter to the ZBA for the conditional use meeting outlining all of fire and safety requirements that would have to be met in order for the Fire Dept to accept a Conditional Use at an event venue. None of these things happened). They explained that NOTHING had changed and that they were out of compliance.

So in May 2022, another CEO, Chris Hanson, had been hired part-time. And after documenting a few of these events, the new CEO part-time sent the Roma's another letter saying they were not in compliance and that if they continued they would get a violation notice and fine. More weddings occurred in 2022, 2023 and in the summer of 2024..

Finally, in October of 2024, the 3rd CEO for Raymond that I have been dealing with sent the Roma's a notice of violation. They had the right to appeal to the ZBA which they did. My attorney also attended. The meeting lasted almost 6 hours. The ZBA did all they could to find a way to not deny the violation but they could not because it was unlawful and they were not aligned with a Conditional Use. DENIED AGAIN. The Roma's position was that they have a right to do anything they want with their property and that there are no rules in Raymond on Rentals. They could not acknowledge that the denial of the Conditional Use applied to them. They claimed everyone in town was against them and made up a bunch of lies about town officials, me and several others. It was not relevant. They asked again for a 'reconsideration from the ZBA'. Another 2 hour meeting and they provide no new or legal reasons for

a reconsideration, It was DENIED again. The town has incurred 20-30 hours of legal fees as a result of this situation.

The Roma's were given another 45 days to appeal to Superior Court and they did not. They have now changed their advertising on social media to say they still have a private event venue but will do it for donations. They are not a non-profit and are trying to get around these rulings.

Six years next month this has been going on!!! I was told by Alex Sirios that I should write an ordinance on rentals to help really stop this type of activity. He threw the problem back in my court. After I have spent tens of thousands of dollars on legal fees to get this town to act and now I have to write an ordinance too! I started down this path when I saw a Select Board meeting where a group of residents were approaching the Board for a Short Term Rental ordinance for a 2nd time.. The room was full of Real Estate people that did not want any ordinance since they are making tons of money managing STRs in Raymond. The Select Board was extremely rude to these people and shut them down. It was embarrassing to watch the Board.

So I joined this group to work on a Short Term Rental Ordinance for Raymond. The group has been together for over 3 years and I have been involved for over 2 years. Again in April, the Select Board was approached and rudely dismissed this group and sent the issue to the Planning Board. I had a number of residents call me and tell me how disrespectful the behavior of some of the Board members were at this meeting. Not a good look for Raymond.

We have provided you with a comprehensive ordinance that has had years of research. One item related to my issue is the concern about parties, gatherings, weddings, etc. at Short Term Rentals. After the pandemic, Airbnb, VRBO, Bookings.com and Homes.com, platforms that help manage Short term Rentals, DO NOT ALLOW any parties or gatherings at STRs and have instituted technology to monitor for these activities. They terminate all agreements that do not comply. There are legal and liability reasons for this rule. No one extra is allowed at these rentals. Only those that are part of the legal stay can be there. There are lots of lawsuits around the country that have happened because of parties at rentals and the towns/municipalities have been drawn into these lawsuits. Also, towns have been sued for not having a good ordinance. The fire on Long Island last summer where 4 people died because the town didn't have a registration and inspection process and the house had multiple code violations including lack of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Airbnb was not found liable but the homeowner was found liable and the town is being sued for negligence.

As you continue your work on the Short-term Rental concerns for Raymond, please take all of these considerations into account. Short-term rentals are very disruptive to a neighborhood. Constant change over of guests, noise, trash, traffic, etc. The list goes on. For a wedding next door, the following happens: Wednesday, large tents get erected in the backyard, 20 feet from my house; Thursday, portable toilets get delivered, caterers start to show up, other vendors; Friday, people are coming and going, (turning around in my driveway all week, dogs get barking, etc). Reherrals, more cars, groups of people, Saturday, wedding——100 cars, loud music (85 decibels at the property line), PA system, gets louder as the night goes on; Sunday, clean up crew begins; Monday/Tuesday the tents come down, the caterers pick up their stuff (drive on my lawn). It is a week of chaos and can be several weeks a summer. They asked for 10-12 events per season in their application.

The last denial for the Romas was in early March of 2025. It is now almost June and the Consent Agreement or discussion on their fine has yet to be finalized. SIX YEARS IN JUNE!

It is time to act! It should have been completed years ago. Over 40 towns in Maine and the Unorganized Territory have STR regulations. Why does a Raymond resident have to spend years and get an attorney to get something accomplished in Raymond. You have a chance to make this right. BE THE CHANGE that is needed. Support your residents that you represent.

I have lots of examples of how intrusive this type of business is in a Rural Residential neighborhood I can send you. Also, just in my neighborhood, there are several STRs. In the winter, most are empty. I have had 4 people stop at my house in the last 6 months asking if I knew of any long term rentals or houses for sale that are affordable. One person was willing to stay in my basement, which is not finished. People are desperate for housing. STRs are having an impact. We cannot just be a town of hotels, motels, STRs, campgrounds, etc. We need a strong balance and set of policies that support that vision.

I do hope you take the time to really understand the issue and develop a robust ordinance and not something to just tick the box. There are several individuals that are making a lot of money with this type of business but it might be at the expense of regular residences. Please take that into consideration. Raymond is a nice community but we don't want to just be Windham West.

Regards,
Katherine Plummer
Katherineplmmr@gmail.com

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