

Preserve WT Subcommittee Meeting Minutes
January 7, 2021

Via Zoom: Whit Griswold, Bruce MacNelly, Heikki Soikkeli, Amy Upton, Ivory Littlefield and Sam Look in attendance.

Whit: We have less than 4 weeks to pull this off. Time is tight.

Bruce & Amy had sent Whit emails about missing the “love letter” at the front end of the bylaw draft. Whit thought that so much language at the front end of a bylaw might not be appropriate. The bylaw will be inserted in among a long list of zoning bylaws. Might show up around page 97.

Bruce: Is thinking that this bylaw is a stand alone that we are presenting to the town. Maybe this is just our introduction to the issue not to the bylaw.

Whit: Agrees. We will have a marketing tour. We can use the “love letter” then. We can use it as a cover letter when we submit it to the Planning Board.

Bruce: “Habitable Space” we might not want to just refer to the building code.

Heikki: International Residential Code (IRC) has a definition of “habitable space”. A space in a building for living, eating, sleeping...etc” We might need to get away from the words “habitable space” when talking about floor area, since it is already pretty specifically defined and that understanding might not align with our meaning. WT has a good definition of floor area.

Include accessory apartments and detached bedrms because they are considered part of the dwelling in WT. If it can be construed as habitable space, it will be counted as habitable space. IRC has all sorts of specifics about light, height, hallway widths, etc. Habitable space is specified in this document that is already used by architects, builders, building inspectors, etc. No need to get into these specifics if they are already being defined and used.

Bruce: For basements we had said it needed egress to be habitable. IRC will count laundry as habitable space.

Heikki: No. There are all sorts of requirements. Minimum light, egress, hallways size, etc.

Bruce: So if you go down your stairs and there is a laundry and the only other access point is a bulkhead it will not count?

Heikki: No it will not.

Does an exercise studio have to have a secondary means of egress. A question for Joe. Is an exercise room considered habitable space.

Bruce: What about movie rooms, TV rooms, etc?

Whit: Consult with Joe so that we are all measuring the same way.

Sam: Are we sure we want basements to be considered as part of the floor area count?
Chilmark excludes basements in their number.

Heikki: What about attics?

Amy: Attics should count. It is so easy to create something that is meant for storage that is easily adaptable as bedrooms. It should not matter what you call it. If it is potentially livable it should count.

Ivory: We first started thinking about basements when we were considering if someone had a walkout and had a whole wall of windows so that the building looked like it was 3 stories.

Heikki: If you had a rec room that met all the egress requirements would the town consider it a bedroom?

Sam: Could we leave it up to discretion of the Planning Board whether the basement is visible as an additional story on any elevation. Then would count towards gross floor area.

Bruce: Leave basements out of it and let Joe Tierney have discretion. If he thinks it is not truly a basement then he can add it into the gross floor area. Might also be a Board of Health determination.

Amy: Likes having basement inclusion at discretion of PB and Joe, etc. If they feel like someone is being ridiculous they can classify it other than a basement.

Heikki: So Attics are in, basements are out, except at the discretion of the building inspector/PB.

All: Yes.

Ivory: Question for Heikki. Your definition includes accessory apts. Do you mean when they are part of the dwelling or not? And Guest Houses would not be included? We had also talked about garages. Garages can grossly increase the mass of the house. Attached to the house makes it so much bulkier.

Bruce: If it is attached it counts, but we would need to be clear about that.

Heikki: Definition would include attached garages but not detached.

Bruce: What about studios, etc.

Heikki: Guest house is called an accessory building. But there is no size limit on studios. A studio is an accessory structure but not a dwelling. Size restrictions on everything but a studio. Gross floor area includes all habitable dwellings.

Bruce: There is a thing in WT about studio size limits if within 50 feet of a setback.

Ivory: Greenhouse should be included if attached.

Whit: Chilmark includes guest houses in their calculation. How are we handling guest houses?

Bruce: If we are going to give 500 sq feet/acre then maybe include

Amy: If we have a cap of 6000 sf that is a lot of building space.

How does Joe define barn v. studio

Bruce: Leave guest houses in and everything else out.

Bruce: How do you define what a studio is? What is a home office? What about a heated barn? Heated garage?

Amy: We want to be clear and clean and precise. But also it is OK if it is a more complicated and difficult process. You really need to be committed to moving here, living here. Otherwise maybe not worth the effort.

Heikki: "all dwelling units". Then it is up to the zoning inspector to determine what is a dwelling and what is not.

Whit: In the spirit of the town to have barns, working from home, etc. just need to define these things so that we are clear about what is in and what is not.

Heikki: Detached bedrooms and accessory apartments are already considered part of dwelling

Bruce: How do we separate studio from a barn from a shed? What if it has no bathroom?

Decision made to reach out to Joe Tierney to learn more about how he classifies and measures things. Heikki and Sam will call him.

Meeting Adjourned

Minutes approved January 23, 2021