

[Buckland backs short-term rental bylaw](#)

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BUCKLAND — Roughly 70 voters passed all 28 articles at Annual Town Meeting on Saturday, most notably adopting a new bylaw to better regulate short-term rentals and approving budget requests totaling nearly \$5.88 million for fiscal year 2025.

The Short-Term Residential Rental Bylaw, put forward by the Planning Board, allows for brief rental lodgings to encourage tourism, while reducing impacts to neighbors and maintaining long-term rental housing for town residents. The bylaw will also help to enforce state and local health and safety regulations.

“As part of our ongoing work to implement the housing plan and promote housing diversity, we have been working on this short-term rental bylaw for about a year and a half,” Planning Board member Andrea Donlon said when presenting the proposed bylaw to voters at Mohawk Trail Regional School. “We have held a lot of public meetings. ... We’ve heard from a lot of members of the town and have taken a lot of opinions into account. ... It continues to be really hard to find rental housing and buy a house in Buckland. Buckland is a desirable place to live.”

According to information presented at a recent public hearing on the bylaw, about 20 short-term rentals were registered in Buckland with the state Department of Revenue in late 2022. But in March of this year, AirDNA, a company that compiles data on short-term rentals, reported 40 “active listings” within the Shelburne Falls market — with 80% renting homes and 20% renting single rooms.

Under the newly adopted bylaw, all short-term rentals must be registered with the town. Each registration must include the property owner’s name and contact details for someone who can respond 24/7 to an emergency or disturbance at the property within two hours. Applicants must also obtain a certificate of liability insurance and a health inspection to determine that the property meets sanitation and building codes.

Short-term rental registration cannot be transferred to another person and it ends whenever the rented property is sold or transferred to another owner, though the Planning Board clarified during the meeting that these properties can be inherited. A designee chosen by the Board of Health will enforce the bylaw. Failure to comply with an enforcement action could result in a \$300 fine, with each day of noncompliance considered a separate violation.

Off-street parking is expected to be provided for each overnight room unless an alternate plan is approved by a special permit. Loud music, excessive traffic and other disturbances are not permitted. No more than two adults per room will be allowed for overnight occupancy.

Mohawk Trail regional agreement

Buckland voters agreed to have another go at amending the funding formula outlined in the Mohawk Trail Regional School District agreement through three articles on the Town Meeting warrant.

The School Committee has asked to change the regional agreement to better align with the state formula for calculating enrollment. While the state's enrollment formula for determining state aid takes into account every child attending public schools — including School Choice and charter students — in what it calls “foundation enrollment,” Mohawk Trail's formula for calculating enrollment, which in turn is used to calculate town assessments, does not. By comparison, town assessments are determined by counting the number of students enrolled on a five-year rolling average. This is called “complete enrollment.” This number does not include School Choice students, charter students and students who enrolled in different districts due to special needs services not offered by Mohawk Trail.

“These amendments were presented last year,” School Committee member David Henry said during Saturday's meeting. “Unfortunately, we have to bring them back this year because they were not approved unanimously [by all member towns]. ... So, we're back again this year.”

Enhanced 911 service

Buckland voters also agreed to raise and appropriate or transfer \$15,541 from available funds to upgrade Buckland-Shelburne Elementary's telephone infrastructure for Enhanced 911 service. The approval of another \$4,297 will be put toward the same project at Mohawk Trail Regional School.

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