On Thursday, September 5, at 7 p.m., a public hearing will be held at the Highlands Community Center (next to the ball field). The purpose of the public hearing is for the Highlands Town Board of Commissioners to receive public comments on the proposed amortization amendment of the town's short-term rental ordinance. Unrelated issues will not be heard during this session but can always be addressed during the public comment period at all monthly town board meetings.

As the presiding public official of this hearing, I have developed the following rules for conducting the hearing, which the town attorney has reviewed. Let me review these three rules.

First, those wishing to make a public comment must sign up to speak as they enter the Highlands Community Building. The sign-up period will be 30 minutes prior to the beginning of the hearing and 5 minutes into the hearing, which will begin promptly at 7 p.m. The town clerk and attending police officer will maintain the sign-up list at the entrance to the community building. Speakers will be recognized in the order they appear on the list.

Second, each speaker will have 3 minutes to make a statement. This limited time is that we anticipate a large number of people wanting to speak at the hearing.

Third, applause after a speaker's comments will not be allowed. Any disruptive behavior, such as shouting at or heckling a speaker making a statement, will result in that person being removed from the hearing. At previous hearings on the STR ordinance, residents were civil and respectful to other speakers, and we all want to continue to maintain this decorum.

The hearing will be remotely accessible from a link on the town website. Those persons not able to attend the hearing and wishing to be heard can submit a written statement of no more than 300 words in advance of the hearing that addresses the issue of amending the STR ordinance to include an amortization provision. Statements will be sent directly to the town clerk, Gibby Saheen, at Gibby.Saheen@highlandsnc.org. The clerk will compile the statements and send them to the Commissioners. While everyone is welcomed to share views with the commissioners and or the mayor, only statements sent to the town clerk will become an official statement of the hearing record.

While I have stated that I do not believe amortization is the best path to follow, I do support the effort to stop and curtail the spread of STRs in Highlands' residential areas. I firmly believe having neighborhoods with full-time and seasonal residents ensures a robust community of concerned citizens for years to come. It also makes our town an attractive place to put down roots and live a quality life.

The public hearing on September 5 will not include a vote to approve or disapprove the amendment. The commissioners will attend the hearing to listen to the public's statements. Final action on the amortization amendment will be on the agenda of the town board meeting on September 19 or at a later meeting.

I will be holding my monthly community coffee on Friday, August 30, at 11 a.m. at the Hudson Library. The topic will be an update on town projects that are underway and those that will be starting soon. Hope to see you at the coffee. As always, I will be taking questions from the audience.