

Change is inevitable, so I was not shocked when I got the call this weekend stating that Old Edwards Hospitality Group and all its properties had been sold. The surprise came when I learned that OEI had not been sold to a large hotel and resort corporation like Marriott, Wyndham, or Hilton but rather to a couple with the real estate knowledge and business commitment to operating facilities like OEI.

I want to congratulate Art and Angela Williams on the successful sale of their properties to folks who will maintain the OEI tradition of being outstanding community partners. Highlands has been fortunate to have the Williams invest in our community for over twenty years. I am sure they will continue to remain engaged in Highlands' life as they take on new endeavors in the coming years.

I want to welcome James and Jessica Whitely as the new owners of OEI. While I know they will maintain the OEI and Highlands tradition as innovative businesspeople, I suspect they will, in time, bring their creative vision to OEI. As mayor, I look forward to meeting with them and discussing Highlands and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Thursday, June 20, is the monthly town board meeting. It will be held at the Highlands Recreation Center and will begin at 7 pm. There is no 6 pm workshop meeting scheduled for this Thursday.

I anticipate the July board meeting to resume at the Highlands Community Center next to the ball field. The contractor is in the final stages of completing the renovations to the Highlands Community Center.

There are two major items on the agenda tonight. First, there will be a public hearing concerning the proposed fiscal year 2024-2025 budget. Following the hearing, the board will review the final budget and hopefully approve the budget. Let me emphasize that after the budget public hearing, the proposed budget can be amended to reflect concerns or needed modifications. A budget has to be approved by July 1 or there would be a continuation of the current budget minus critical items like pay raises and capital projects. I anticipate the board approving the proposed budget.

Another major item will be a review of a proposed STR ordinance amendment that would amortize the grandfathered status of STRs currently in operation. In short, grandfathered STRs in R1 or R2 would get a designated period of continued operation before STR use would have to stop.

I have recently expressed my opinion that amortization is not the best course of action. I believe over time, the number of STRs in residential neighborhoods will diminish, and therefore, I advocate for improved enforcement actions of currently grandfathered STRs. I share with a number of commissioners the view that we do not want to see our residential zones overwhelmed with short-term rentals. Nevertheless, a number of commissioners do not

embrace my position and believe amortization is the best course of action. I will say that if the board does embrace amortization, it will resolve the issue of STRs, maybe throughout the state, by possible state preemption legislation and/or legal actions.

The language for amortization was drafted by the town attorney as requested by the board. The amendment is very brief and straightforward. If the amortization action is adopted, a review process will ensure that it includes a planning board review and a public hearing.

The meeting on Thursday can be accessed by a link on the town website.