

Subject: STR Legal Actions
August 2, 2022

I have complied with the Save Highlands attorney's public document request, and all my emails concerning STRs have been sent to Derek Allen. There may be a few I have overlooked or missed, but I have made a good faith effort to fully comply with the request. Also, I included a disclosure statement concerning the conversations, or lack thereof, I have had with people in the community that Allen demanded, including individual conversations with members of the planning board and the neighborhood coalition.

I have nothing to hide. As an elected official I discuss a plethora of issues with citizens. I view these interactions as a part of my duties. Many people ask that I keep their statements on certain concerns out of the public discussion. Nevertheless, they want their mayor to know how they feel about certain issues. I have always honored those requests not in the spirit of concealment, but rather in respecting the privacy of citizens. It is analogous to the concept of the secret ballot. Everyone has the right to cast a ballot in a voting booth. The booth becomes a private space while the voter is marking his or her ballot. They place their vote into the ballot box, and the voter doesn't have to tell anyone how they voted.

So, I hope the people who expressed their opinion, regardless of their views, will be given the same considerations in this legal situation. I understand the open records process and know what I have said and written are public records. I also respect that some citizens may feel uncomfortable having their views aired in the public arena. Hopefully, this current situation does not have a lasting chilling effect on public discourse between town elected officials and residents.

I stand by what I have said in the past. While I might evolve and adjust my position about a critical issue as more information comes forth, I try to be thoughtful and clear in my public statements, such as what I write in this column each week. On the STR issue I have consistently taken the position that the town should regulate, register and restrict STRs. I have based my actions on these three concepts. Yes, the courts have ruled that blanket, across the board registration is prohibited by state statute. On the other hand, there is the legal issue as to whether a municipality can require zoning permits. That issue may be settled in the courts, as well as possibly other contentious STR issues such as restricting them to specific zones, etc.

I am all too aware that there has been some very heated rhetoric over STRs. There are many nuances, conflicts, and conditions for any proposed plan. The debate intensity is understandable given that the board decision could impact many people. Some specific statements that have been spoken in public are unfortunate and disturbing. Among different stakeholder groups there can be extreme differences without labeling or denigrating specific groups of people. We are better than that as a caring community.

We are all exhausted over the STR issue, that goes for whether one is for or against them. I hope we will be able to emerge as a united community once a resolution to this issue occurs.