

Subject: Short Term Rentals - update
July 13, 2022

Thursday is a Special Meeting of the Highlands Board of Commissioners. It will be held at the Highlands Community Center next to the ball field at 6pm. The meeting can be accessed at the town website via YouTube.

The purpose of this public meeting is to review proposed unified development ordinance amendments regarding short term rentals. Bob Hagemann of Poyner Spruill will present proposed amendments to the Board. These amendments were generated by the Board's work group and also discussed by the entire Board in an attorney/client closed session. At that meeting the Board asked Bob to create draft proposals for final review before being sent to the Planning Board for their review.

Thursday night, Bob will guide the Board through the draft proposals and answer questions from the Board. The Board may make final adjustments to the drafts during this period. There will be no public comment at that meeting.

I also anticipate that the Board will set at the meeting a date and time for a public hearing in regard to the amendments that will be sent to the Highlands Planning Board for their recommendations. The Planning Board members will receive the drafts as soon as possible after the meeting. They will also be posted on the town's website.

The Planning Board is scheduled to have its regular meeting on Monday, July 25 where they will begin the review process. If needed, the Planning Board can continue the review process at their August 22 meeting.

I anticipate the town Board holding a public hearing concerning the planning Board's recommendations on August 25. My caveat is that unforeseen circumstances could change the schedule that I have outlined above. If more time is needed for a complete review, that option will be available.

In my last column I asked any group that might have a compromise position on STRs to let me know or bring it before the public for consideration. At the time of this writing, I do not know whether the newspapers have and will publish a compromise proposal that I have not seen.

I know that on social media some folks have criticized me for calling for a compromise proposal at this time. My intent was to try to ascertain any new approaches to solving this divisive community issue. Some may think I am passing the buck or am late in calling for a compromise.

I received a statement from the Highlands Neighborhood Coalition that pretty much confirms their previously held position. I have not received any proposals from the Save Highlands Group.

I suspect my concern is correct that when it comes to short term rentals in R1 and R2 there is no middle ground. A person is for them or against them with possibly some conditions in between.

The coming weeks will be contentious and stressful times for many folks in the community. Is the Mayor under stress? You bet, but I have been in stressful situations many times before. The town will work through this problem.