

Subject: Town Meeting

September 14, 2022

Thursday night is the September Highlands Board of Commissioners meeting; it will begin at 7 pm at the Highlands Community Center next to the ball field. Public comment is the first item on the agenda.

The board will again review short-term rental amendments. At the work session on September 8, the board asked our attorneys to research and identify options concerning home stays, bed and breakfasts, and tourist inns. Specifically, the board wanted a review of existing state statutes related to these classifications.

I don’t know if there will be a final approval of the proposed STR ordinances tonight. The board may request the attorneys to do more work on the structure and language of the amendments and bring those changes back for review.

As written now, the ordinances contain an amortization provision. Dependent on a final board decision, people who are currently operating short-term rentals could continue to do so until a specific date, after which all short-term rental operations would have to cease in R1 and R2. I suspect that the board will approve a 3-year amortization period. Residents who have not operated a STR before the enactment of the ordinance could not operate STR rentals during this period. Basically, the proliferation of new STRs in residential zones would be halted.

For folks who have been operating a STR, there would be no registration or permit requirements. Within the new ordinance, a number of basic regulations would have to be followed. For example, there would be on-site parking requirements and a limitation on large gatherings.

The board is aware that an amortization provision could trigger legal challenges. The attorneys representing the town believe there is a strong legal argument supporting amortization. Nevertheless, they also acknowledge that other entities do not concur. A decision by the courts would resolve the issue, and of course, all parties would abide by any final court decision.

We have a full agenda Thursday night  beyond the STR review. For several months our staff and crews have been involved in replacing a critical sewer pump system on Arnold Road. This project is costing the town more than first estimated, so a budget amendment will need to be approved in order to get the new pump system on line.

The board will also review our current and proposed ordinances concerning overnight parking and camping on town property. Our police department has been investigating the issue and will make recommendations. The town has a lot of undeveloped property, especially around the recreation department. We need clear ordinances prohibiting overnight parking and camping in these areas.

The board will also be updated concerning the intermodal test conducted on the Big Bear Pen Tower. There has been a concern of interference between the radio and the cell phone antenna on the tower.

I will facilitate a discussion concerning electric vehicle charging stations. Before proceeding, the town board needs to address several policy questions.

Thursday night’s meeting can also be accessed on YouTube through the town website.

Mayor Pat