

Planners greenlight short-term rental policy with changes

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SENECA — A revised version of a controversial ordinance governing short-term rentals is headed to city council with the recommendation of the Seneca Planning Commission — six months after the

commission rejected an earlier version of the ordinance.

But the commission did recommend a couple of changes to the policy.

Members voted 4-1 this week to approve recommendation of the ordinance with two

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changes. One alteration changes the minimum stay required from two to five consecutive days. The other recommended change reduces the maximum radius from the city of Seneca of a short-term rental agent from 75 miles to 25 miles.

If approved, the proposed ordinance would amend the official revised zoning ordinance and regulate and allow short-term rentals.

Seneca planning and development director Ed Halbig told the commission the ordinance was “intended to deter activities that might have a negative impact on quality of life in residential neighborhoods,” including “off-street parking, excessive or irregular trash use and lack of accountability for disturbances.” He added that the ordinance would not supersede homeowners association covenants.

The proposed ordinance is now scheduled to be discussed by Seneca City Council at an Oct. 30 work session. The first reading of the proposed ordinance is not expected until the council’s Nov. 13 meeting, with a second and final reading likely on Dec. 11.

Council approved the original version of the ordinance on first reading in April, but the planning commission rejected recommending approval the following week. About 80 residents of the Normandy Shores community attended the planning commission meeting in April, with most of the residents speaking saying they were against the ordinance. The council tabled the issue at its monthly meeting in May, about a week before Scott Moulder started his job as city administrator.

In August, council ac-

cepted a recommendation from Moulder to scrap the first ordinance and start over with a new version with a new hearing before the commission.

The vote to recommend the new version of the ordinance by the commission this week came after about 30 minutes of concerns raised by residents of two subdivisions. No one spoke in favor of the ordinance.

Flora Riley, president of the Normandy Shores Association, said the ordinance still needs work.

“The short-term rental ordinance, as it’s now written, is bad for residents (and) it’s bad for the city,” Riley told the commission. “There have been some changes, but



Riley

there are still several other issues that need to be addressed before this ordinance is ready to go.”

Frank Kler, another Normandy Shores resident, said he didn’t see “there has been an awful lot of change in the substance of the document.” He said he was concerned about the distance in part of the ordinance allowing those handling concerns to be within 75 miles. He suggested it should be 25 miles.

Kler said short-term rentals are “turning our neighborhoods into business zones.”

“Owners do not want a constant revolving door of people coming in and out,” he said, adding that he and his wife chose their home because “we were comforted by the fact that the residents lived there.”

Judy Stancil, who also lives in Normandy Shores, said the 75-mile distance “is too far away” and asked the

commission to consider reducing the limit to 25 or 50 miles.

“We don’t want to stand in the way of the city making progress and moving ahead or owners having the right to do what they want to with their own property, but we would like more consideration to this issue, as 75 miles puts us in Atlanta and Charlotte’s back doors,” she said.

Mike White, a resident of the White Oak Cliffs community, called short-term rentals “renting on steroids,” and gave an example of a short-term rental owner he said “was pulling in \$70,000 a year” from a short-term rental property.

“That’s when short-term rentals become a business,” he said. “It’s the noise issue, it’s the trash issue.”

Commission chairman Barry Duvall noted regulations of property owner associations would not be superseded by the ordinance.

“I’m always leery of telling someone what they can and can’t do — as a government body — with their own property, whereas I am 100 percent in favor of property owner associations telling people what they can and can’t do with their property,” he said. “The city in essence is being asked to do what communities are either not willing to or haven’t done.”

Riley said after the meeting the proposed ordinance is “still a work in progress.”

“We were happy to see the two changes that the commission proposed,” she said. “I still think it’s a work in progress. It could change between now and city council meeting as well.”