

Seneca toughens on short-term rental policy

BY NORM CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — City administrator Scott Moulder recommended a change in Seneca's proposed short-term rental ordinance Tuesday night that would only allow primary residences to be rented.

"It will prevent secondary homes and out-of-state property owners," Moulder told the council. "It will prevent these people who actually don't live here from being able to buy up properties and rent them for investment and business purposes and operate a business inside a residential community. You have to actually own and live in the home in order to short-term rent it."

Under state law, a homeowner can only rent a home for up to 72 days a year for the home to be considered a primary residence and qualify for

a 4-percent tax assessment for tax purposes. Secondary homes have 6-percent tax assessment. He said primary residents who want to rent their homes still can, within limits.

"If John Public wants to say, 'You know what? I might want to rent my home for seven Saturdays a year or seven weekends a year for a Clemson game.' They can do that under the ordinance," he said. "But it will prevent someone from Atlanta buying up four homes on one street and saying, 'I'm going to rent these things and make a ton of money' and destroy the character of the community."

"It holds the primary resident owner accountable to the neighbors," Moulder added. "I think it is a great compromise."

He added the change allows council "to take care

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of our residents."

"That's who you guys represent," he said. "We don't represent a firm out of Atlanta. Let's take care of people who live here and prevent the intrusion of people who don't."

Moulder said work on rewriting the ordinance has begun and he hopes to have it to city attorney Bo Bowman soon, with a goal of presenting the proposed ordinance for a final vote as early Aug. 27.

Normandy Shores Association president Flora Riley, who has spoken against previous versions of the ordinance,

said she supports Moulder's proposal.

"I think 4 percent is a safety valve where it's just local people renting out to other people," she said.

Mike White, of the White Oak Point neighborhood, agreed, adding neighborhoods that have approved covenants restricting short-term rentals would still be in effect.

"I think going down to the 4 percent is going to resolve a majority of the issues and keeping in mind the covenants are going to be the backbone of this," White said. "Now we've got

the city being partners, I think we're set to go. This has been good work on, I believe, everyone's part — the city and the community."

Lakewood Estates resident David Wicker, whose community also approved covenants restricting short-term rentals recently, said he also likes the changes proposed at the meeting.

"I think the new ordinance as described by Scott Moulder will work for Lakewood Estates and take care of our short-term rental issues," he said.