

Final vote delayed on Seneca short-term

Statewide organization making calls to homeowners

BY NORM CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Seneca's proposed short-term rental ordinance is not on the agenda for a final reading at tonight's city council meeting.

City administrator Scott Moulder said the vote was delayed to allow time for council to review two versions of the ordinance that are being considered. He said one version has language "cleaned up" from the ordinance approved on first

reading in June. It would limit the number of people staying in a short-term rental to two people per bedroom up to a maximum of 12. It would also require one paved parking space onsite — not on the street — per bedroom and local management at all times.

The second version would limit short-term rentals to homes that are the primary residence of a homeowner. Those properties can rent short term for a total of 72 days per year and keep their 4 percent tax assessment rate as the owner's primary residence. It would not allow short-term rentals on properties that are second homes with a 6 percent tax assessment rate.

rental ordinance

Moulder said he received the two versions Friday from city attorney Bo Bowman and was going to review both before sending them to council members.

"We couldn't get the document out in time for everybody to review it first, so we're going to put it off," he said of the vote. Moulder said there were no

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other discussions on the proposed short-term rental ordinance planned at tonight's meeting, except that "there's an executive session to discuss the litigation threat." The only matter listed on tonight's agenda under executive session was "legal advice regarding potential litigation."

During a council meeting Aug. 29, local Realtor Reah Smith, a member of the Western Upstate Association of Realtors, told council the city could face legal action if owners of second homes are not included in the ordinance.

"The passage of an ordinance like this would possibly lead to litigation, which would result in high legal fees incurred by the city council to defend the ordinance," she said.

Last week, the South Carolina Community Alliance (SCCA) made calls to the owners of second homes in the Seneca area letting them know about the proposed ordinance.

Smith said the calls were being made by a person with a script and "it's not prerecorded or automated."

including the more than 1,450 members of the Western Upstate Association of Realtors.

"The SCCA is conducting an education campaign that includes phone calls notifying 1,830 homeowners and investors in the Seneca area of a proposed ordinance limiting short-term rentals

"The calls are only going to 6 percent owners. They're not targeting 4 percent owner-occupied homes," Smith said. "The purpose is to make sure these owners are aware. If you're not local, if you don't take The Journal especially, you may have no idea that this is being considered. We're simply just trying to notify potential affected properties."

"The official position of all three Realtor associations — the local, state and national — is that we're here to protect private property rights," she added. "No one from the Realtor association is against regulation. My concern is if we take this property right from these secondary property owners, it doesn't actually solve the problem. I just don't see that taking away the private property rights can actually fix some of these issues that they're actually having."

Sara Brown of the South Carolina Realtors wrote in an email to The Journal that the alliance "is a program of the South Carolina Association of Realtors," funded by the 23,900 members statewide,

that may be considered by the city and that it may impact their private property rights," Brown wrote. "We will continue to educate the public as long as necessary to make sure they remain fully informed as this ordinance is debated."