

Residents talk short-term rentals

BY NORM CANNADA
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SENECA— A proposed short-term rental ordinance wasn't on the agenda at Tuesday's Seneca City Council meeting, but nearly a dozen people expressed opinions about the issue during the meeting's public comment period.

The city is currently considering two versions of a short-term rental ordinance. One would allow and regulate short-term rentals for all homeowners, except where neighborhood covenants have prohibited or is more strict than the city ordinance. The other version would limit short-term rentals outside of those neighborhoods to homes considered the primary residence for the homeowner, meaning the homes could only be rented 72 days a year to keep a home as a primary residence and its 4-percent tax assessment rate.

Realtors have opposed the second proposal, arguing those who own second homes have the right to rent their properties as well.

John Pulliam, a local Realtor, suggested both sides of the issue come together and talk.

"There's points on both sides of this," Pulliam said. "Everybody needs to acknowledge that. I think there is some common ground already.

We can simply get a small group from both sides, the Realtor group, the concerned citizens, the folks that want to make progress and get things done. Compromise goes with that.

"We are in favor of regulation on the short-term rental issue and we're in favor of property rights," he added. "This is definitely a complicated issue. We feel strongly it is a conflict best resolved outside of the legal arena. That's going to be a lot of money, that's going to be a lot of time. We're not out there trying to drum up a lawsuit."

Mike White, a resident of the White Oak Point, said the proposed draft allowing short-term rentals for primary and secondary homes would "regulate" instead of "prohibit" and could bring an end to an issue council has been dealing with for nearly 18 months.

"We could get that one done," he said. "We can always do tweaks. This

isn't the 10 Commandments we're doing. I would like to see it get moving. Aren't you guys getting short-term rental fatigue? I do understand the 6-percent issue. What

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you don't understand is that we've been doing this for 18 months. What I wouldn't like us to do is to get so overwhelmed with the changes that we stall on this thing. I want to say to the Realtors, 'We can't wait any longer.'"

David Wicker told council several large cities across the nation have significant limits to short-term rentals. He urged council

to approve one of the two proposals.

"My hope is the city will pass one of the two recommendations that Mr. Moulder gave to council so that we have some legislation on the books that will not allow short-term rentals in areas where the covenants prohibit that," he said.

Paul Stovall agreed.

"I lived in my home 35 years," he said. "I hate to see where this could go."

John Johnston, who lives in Lakewood Estates where Wicker and Stovall live, also agreed the issue needs to be settled soon and said he would support either of the two proposals.

"This doesn't really need a whole lot of ongoing debate," he said. "I don't think it needs a committee to stall it for another five months. It needs to happen. Please do something and do it soon."

Flora Riley, president of the Normandy Shores Association, asked council to make sure the ordinance protects the neighborhoods that have approved covenants prohibiting or limiting short-term rentals. She added she wanted to see permits to rent revoked "after a specific number of calls to the city" about violations of the ordinance. She encouraged council to require short-term rental owners to get a business license in addition to a permit to have a short-term rental in the city. She said she supports limiting the rental properties to primary residents and said the owner and manager of the rental unit should live within 25 miles of the home.

"The ordinance needs to be as specific as possible," she said.