

Short-term rental income topped \$3M this summer

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WALHALLA — Short-term rentals across Oconee County brought in more than \$3 million in August alone — up more than 12 percent from last year.

County parks, recreation and tourism director Phil Shirley said Oconee had 436

short-term rentals in 2021, which is more than Pickens County's 289 and Anderson County's 190 combined.

"It's amazing to watch this continue to climb," he said during the county Parks, Recreation and Tourism Commission meeting last week. "Those of

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you that are in this business, you've seen it take off. Our listings continue to go up, (and with) the availability of those listings, our occupancy continues to climb."

He said the average daily rate for a rental is just shy of \$350, but it jumps to around \$400 during the summer.

Commission member Greg Coutu said a lot of communities were against short-term rentals and asked if the information was available somewhere the public could see it.

"Over the past five years or so, there's been a big push by a lot of the homeowners and communities to do away with these (rentals)," he said. "I wonder if they knew where some of that money goes — because I think the homeowners think, 'Oh it's just going to these people and they're getting rich,' and they're not really seeing how a lot of this is being reinvested into their community."

Shirley said the information is public record and confirmed approximately \$75,000 of the \$3 million August sales was paid to accommodations tax, which is used to fund recreation and tourism projects in the county.

COMMISSION OKS EMERGENCY FUNDING REQUEST FOR WPAC

The Walhalla Performing Arts

Center requested a \$25,000 emergency grant from the commission.

"The pandemic closed down the performing arts center for quite some time," Shirley told the commission. "Being closed that long, they depleted reserves. And while things are starting to pick back up, there is a need for a boost, if you will, to get deposits and booking additional shows to keep this thing rocking and rolling."

The one-time grant is outside of the normal grants cycle, but he said the center is eligible for the emergency funding and it's a way for the county to give the center "a little shot in the arm" until things balance out.

"They have about 80 performances a year, and a lot of their customer base is not Oconee County residents," Shirley said. "If they don't get (the grant), they can't book. They have to wait until things come in to keep booking. We all know the impact the performing arts center has, and I think it's an opportunity for us to provide a little bit of assistance to a place that's usually providing impact for all of us."

The commission approved the emergency request.

Shirley said the center can still apply for the next round of grants. Applications for the spring grants cycle are due Feb. 15.