

**Short-Term Rental (STR) Ad Hoc Committee  
Public Listening Session  
City Hall, Police Training Center, Lake Geneva, WI  
April 3, 2024 - 5:00 – 6:00 p.m.**

*Committee Members present:* Joan Yunker (Aldersperson District #1), Tom Keefe, Neal Kolb, Luke Pfeifer, Jason Smolarek, Carol Pearson, Jason Renz (Code Enforcer, Assistant Building Inspector), Fred Walling (Building Inspector), and Joel Hoiland (Aldersperson-Elect District #3).

*Residents in attendance:* Jo Etta Stotko, Peg Esposito (Aldersperson District #3), Tom Bauman, Brian E. Holt, Jim Flower, Brian Dalton, Paul Hummel, Sherri Ames, Todd Krause (Mayor-Elect), Thomas Cincotta, Trisha Bennett, Linda Robinson, Scott Robinson, Mary Jo Fesenmaier. (Aldersperson District #2), Cindy Yager (Aldersperson District #4).

Joel Hoiland calls the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m.

Joel reviews the definition of an Ad Hoc Committee: a committee that is formed to address specific issues. The purpose of Our STR Ad Hoc group's purpose is to review the current STR ordinance and recommend changes to the planning commission. At that point, the planning commission will review and provide recommendations to the City Council.

Joel states that the fact is that there are 73 STRs in Lake Geneva that are licensed. We know there are others, and we hope to find ways to identify the unofficial STRs and bring them into compliance with state and city rules and regulations.

We think it is important that residents are able to report issues and know their concerns will be taken seriously.

Joel clarifies that we are not including Bed and Breakfasts (of which there are 5 in Lake Geneva) or commercial indoor lodging facilities (of which there are 40 in Lake Geneva), which have different sets of ordinances.

At this Listening Session, the public is invited to speak about their concerns. Speakers step up one by one as follows:

**Sherri Ames** (Aldersperson-Elect District #1)

Sherri thinks there should be changes in the committee now that the STR Chairman, Mr. Hoiland, is a new Alderman-Elect (for District #3). She also stated that the Alder/Plan Commissioner should also change because Ms. Yunker will no longer be on the City Council.

Sherri states that 32 of the 73 STRs are in the First District alone. This is a problem of oversaturation.

Sherri said, "I know of an STR house in one of the neighborhoods. Someone, an STR guest was smoking pot. The resident called the LG police to report it and was told, 'We will see if that is something we will address. They (the police) never came.'" Sherri said that we as a city need to protect the residents, not just the business owners.

Sherri stated that it is a problem that residents were not aware that a STR (sub) committee was meeting ahead of being approved by the council.

**Peg Esposito – Alderperson District #3**

Peg states that one of the things we, City Council members, were working on was to hire a company to do the reporting of STR violations, not leave it to the residents. Hiring a company that has a reporting component. If this group does not recommend that, I hope that you will look at this problem and try to figure out how to make it easy to report and how to do something when there is a valid report.

**Paul Hummel – Resident**

Paul points out that one of the problems that is partly due to the STR problem in District #1 is declining school enrollment. Families with young children cannot afford the house prices that have gone up due to the STR market. We used to have a lot of kids in our Maple Park neighborhood when we moved in in 2006. For example, at neighborhood block parties, where close to 100 people attended, there was a significant group of children. Now, no longer.

Paul said “I would like to have access to information about who owns the STRs. I would like to see and know what the procedure for processing violations is, and whether Owners are being held accountable when ordinances are violated.”

**Cindy Yager – Alderperson District #4**

Cindy states that there are a lot of ideas and issues surrounding STRs. She said “I use STR’s when I am on vacation. But there are several things I look for 1) that there is a manager on site to address issues immediately and 2) that the advertised rental is accurate as far as location information.”

Cindy tells the group about an unfortunate STR experience she had when she and her family were on vacation out of town. The STR house was not accurately depicted; it was in fact far from the center of town rather than “within walking distance,” as it was described in the STR platform. Cindy thinks an outside company that specializes in STR oversight would be the best use of our time and resources to help bring integrity to the local STR market.

Cindy’s third point is that she thinks there needs to be a central place to report offenses and not have the homeowner/resident have the burden of reporting, which can put residents in vulnerable positions.

***NOTE** that there is a brief discussion about STR platforms and problems with accurate mapping. Joel notes that some of the maps are wrong because of issues within the platforms, such as Airbnb or VRBO. Owners can suppress the location up until the time of booking. Others present concur.*

**Mary Jo Fesenmaier – Alderperson District #2**

Mary Jo does not want to believe that the State intended for the situation to turn into what it has become when it changed the laws about STRs in 2017. “It is unfortunate that the decision to allow STRs in neighborhoods has impacted so many residents and communities in negative ways.”

Mary Jo wants to make sure that all violation notices and fines are given not only to the STR renters but to the STR Owners as well.

Mary Jo said that the City Council did review and approve Avenu Software, a company that specializes in helping communities monitor STR issues, but that item is now “stuck” in a financing committee. She hopes that this committee will work to move that process along. She believes that one advantage to having a company such as

Avenu work with the city is that documentation of proper code enforcement and violations will be centralized and will not go away.

Mary Jo says she and many other residents are very concerned that we do not have adequate enforcement on weekends. She encourages the STR committee to “Please be thorough and take your time. Bring your ideas to the Planning Commission on a regular basis.”

**NOTE** Alderwoman Fesenmaier stated that “the City Council approved Avenu Software, a company that specializes in helping communities monitor STR issues, but that item is now “stuck” in a financing committee.” This statement is incorrect. The City Council has not approved contracting with Avenu nor was funding allocated in the 2024 budget. It is also noted that Alderwoman Fesenmaier is a member of the Finance, Licensing, and Regulation (FLR) Committee and actively participates in FLR deliberations.

#### **Scott Robinson – STR Owner**

Scott says that he is here to represent the voice of STR Owners who are following the city and state requirements. He and his wife own an STR at 1201 Madison Street. “We know our neighbors and they all have our contact information. We have friendly relationships with them.”

Scott sees that the problems the City is having with STRs is not an STR problem, but an (STR) Owner problem. Whatever rules and procedures are being violated is because the Owners are not doing their job. For example, his house rules are really tight. We STR owners are taxpayers, we pay lodging tax, and we pay more money to the city than many residents. We maintain our property and believe that we are enhancing Lake Geneva. We have made major investments and want to be wise in how we maintain and steward them.

He hopes that this committee helps to solve the problem of Owners who are not licensed and not adhering to the regulations. “Please address the real problems rather than penalize everybody.”. He hopes the Committee will hone in on the issues that are real issues. He points out that other issues brought up this evening are not specific to STRs, such as the pot smoking violation, lack of affordable housing, the reduced number of children in neighborhoods, and the decline of Block Parties.

Scott says he is not clear about why the City enforces a 180-day-per-year occupancy limit. Owners want to bring up the issue of why the city needs to have a 180-day limit.

#### **Trisha Bennett – STR Owner**

Trisha says she is also an STR Owner. “I have three properties. I have been in the business for seven years. I also wonder what the 180-day limit is all about.” She said that one of the things she has done is to have a very thorough and signed contract that all my guests need to sign. I have a curfew. All outside noise has to stop at 10 pm. She suggests that all STR Owners have such a contract and wonders if this committee would encourage the City to have such a contract for all STR Owners to have all of their guests sign.

Trisha said that she sees that it is in the Businessperson’s interest to weed out the bad players.

At this point, Scott Robinson stands up and addresses all the people present, asking if anyone knows the reason for the 180-day rule. Among the replies:

- Mary Jo Fesenmaier says “It is a state rule, which the City of Lake Geneva upholds for the sake of the City residents.”

- Emily Hummel says the limit on rentable days helps the residents know that their neighborhoods are still residential neighborhoods. “If STR guests are constantly coming and going, it feels like we live in a business district, a hotel district, not a residential neighborhood. For many residents, our home is our primary investment, and we need and want to protect it, our neighborhoods, and our quality of life.” The 180-day limit helps do that.
- Joel Hoiland points out that during the off-season, per the existing ordinance STR owners can rent once per month. Short clarification and discussion follow.

Joel asks if there are any more comments. As no one else responds, he then consults with the committee to determine the date and time for the next meeting. After discussion, it was agreed that the next meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee will be on Wednesday, April 17<sup>th</sup> from 5 – 7 pm.

Mayor-Elect Todd Krause asked if the next meeting could be held in the City Hall Chambers so it could be recorded and for Zoom capabilities to be available. Joel said that if the space is available on April 17 he would work to schedule it there. When it is decided where the meeting will take place within City Hall, it will be posted on the City website.

At the next meeting, we will review the public comments made at this meeting. Our first task, Joel says, is to review the Ordinance. We will be discussing it, revising it, getting feedback, and then will present it to the Plan Commission. Our target is to get it done by May.

The following meetings will be held every two weeks on Wednesday evenings until we reach that goal: April 17<sup>th</sup>, May 1<sup>st</sup>, May 15<sup>th</sup>. Members of the public will be able to observe these meetings, and future opportunities will be made available to receive feedback on a draft ordinance, once the committee is ready for outside review.

***NOTE*** *No other Ad Hoc Committees, in recent years, have met in City Hall Chambers nor have the committee meetings been recorded.*

**The meeting is adjourned at 6:15 pm.**