

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Planning Commission and Staff

My name is Donna Watson, and I am representing Protect VB Neighborhoods. Protect VB Neighborhoods is a grass-roots civic organization comprised of citizens who are concerned about the erosion of residential neighborhoods and the health and safety issues caused by short-term rentals. We have members from throughout the City – as well as other areas.

The City's Comprehensive Plan's vision says that:

“Virginia Beach will be a City with vibrant, well-maintained neighborhoods where all residents have the opportunity to obtain desirable, safe and affordable housing and enjoy a high quality of life.”

People have bought homes in neighborhoods with the expectation that they will be safe places to live, work, raise families and retire. Allowing unfettered and uncontrolled short-term rentals, a commercial activity, adversely affects the quality of life and the feeling of safety in your own home.

For over two years, City-appointed Committees and City staff have looked at this issue and have held more than a dozen hearings. They should be commended for being so thoughtful in their deliberations. Since June 2015, Councilwoman Henley has discussed short term rentals at her monthly district forum and other community meetings.

Since short term rentals are not currently permitted by the City Zoning Ordinance, and therefore an illegal use of homes in Virginia Beach, it is imperative that the City do something to codify this use. In our opinion, Alternative #2 is a fair compromise that will allow those who

are currently renting their houses as short-term rentals to continue to do so. New short-term rentals, which are primarily those placed on on-line platforms, will have to get a Conditional Use Permit. This will let people know what is going on in their neighborhood. With the grandfathering provision, there should not be a flurry of CUPs. Alternative #3 basically sets up an overlay for the entire City. This will drastically destabilize one of the best aspects of Virginia Beach – good neighborhoods.

All three proposed alternatives recommend a maximum occupancy standard which will help to ensure the safety of these rentals. Currently, the owner or management company establishes how many people can sleep in a house

The proposed regulations of two people per bedroom plus four is in keeping with so many other universally established building standards and what is considered reasonable in the Virginia Code and HUD guidelines.

Limiting rentals to only one rental in a 7-day period will help ensure stability in neighborhoods. It is very unsettling to have a revolving door of people in the house next door. Do you need to keep your doors locked at all times? The revolving door of strangers also plays havoc with such fine institutions as Neighborhood Watch. Are the people in the rental another crop of renters, or is it someone who has broken in the house?

We thank the City for taking action on a 311 number so that people know who to call if there is an issue with a short-term rental. For years, we have been told to call the police non-emergency number, which is not fair to our thinly-stretched police force who have far more important problems.

Requiring a contact person who can respond in 30 minutes is essential. There is nothing more frustrating than calling one of the realty companies and getting a recording or their maintenance person. Sadly, this still happens.

Thank you for your time and attention to this very important issue. While I am sure you have heard from many businesses and investors, the concerns of the residents of Virginia Beach should be given great emphasis. After all, we are the ones who live in this community and call it home.