



## Views mixed on rental rules changes

### Some see level playing field, while others see encroachment on private neighborhoods

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Although the Hall County Board of Commissioners will not vote until March 14, on Thursday, they heard mixed opinions at a public hearing about proposed changes to short-term rental rules in the county.

The current ordinance, passed in March 2018, only allows homes zoned Residential-I to be vacation rentals if they are within 500 feet

of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers line around Lake Lanier and if they are in a subdivision with 10 or fewer homes. Properties zoned Residential-II, in higher density areas, are not allowed to serve as vacation rentals.

Proposed changes would allow all homes zoned Residential-I and Residential-II to be vacation rentals, fol-

lowing approval by the Hall County Planning Commission, which would conduct a hearing where neighbors could comment.

“Essentially what it boils down to is each and every district will have the same rules and regulations, whereas they can apply as a use subject to planning commission approval,” Srikanth Yamala, the county’s



Yamala

Hall County Board of Commissioners  
When: 6 p.m. Thursday, March 14

Where: Hall County Government Center, 2875 Browns Bridge Road, Gainesville

planning director, said. While properties zoned Vacation Cottage can get a business license to be a short-term rental as a matter of

right, one change proposed would require those homes to also seek planning commission approval.

Commissioner Billy Powell said the changes were being proposed after officials observed the current rule in place over the past year. The proposed ordinance could still be adapted after commissioners hear from the community, he said.

Powell also said some people

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## RENTALS

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were already violating the rules with their vacation rentals, but the new rules would provide the county with more opportunities for oversight.

“People were doing it anyway, with no regulation and no way of enforcing it,” Powell said. “That’s what we are trying to balance.”

Debbie Hemphill of Suwanee has operated a short-term rental home in Gainesville for four years and said the home rents about 140 days a year.

“I screen my guests, require them to be at least 25 years old and to sign a lease agreement. I have quiet hours and parking restric-

tions,” she said.

Hemphill said people are starting to travel differently, and the Lake Lanier area should adapt as a tourist destination.

“Families no longer want to stay in hotels. They are looking for places that feel like home,” she said.

Keith Platt of Oakwood said he and his wife were skeptical when they became AirBnB hosts because they also live at the residence they rent out, but they have had a positive experience.

“The people we have staying with us are professionals, a lot of them. They’re race car drivers from out of town going to Road Atlanta, they’re fishermen on the lake, they’re families trying to get together,” he said.

Platt also noted that when tourists come from out of the county,

“that’s revenue.” “They’re paying sales tax. They’re paying other ways with local businesses,” he said.

Stacey Dickson, president of the Lake Lanier Convention and Visitors Bureau, also spoke in favor of the changes.

“The Convention and Visitors Bureau sees this as leveling the playing field for all the zoning areas. It gives the planning and zoning commission an opportunity to quantify or qualify each proposal regardless of their zoning in the approved area,” she said. “That’s a good thing. It doesn’t automatically put everyone in the OK zone. That can eliminate some problem properties that might be party houses and things like that.”

But some people said that they had been negatively impacted

by vacation rental homes in their neighborhoods.

Jerry Hulsey of Gainesville said he was concerned about who could be staying in residential neighborhoods in short-term rentals.

“I don’t care who you talk to, what you make them fill out ... You don’t know the person,” Hulsey said.

Dennis Pritchett of Flowery Branch said neighborhoods zoned Residential-I should maintain their character.

“To me, R-I is a privilege to live in. It has certain criteria, certain provisions,” he said. “R-I to me is a sanctuary, where a person goes after working and just lives there and relaxes there and shouldn’t have to worry about what is going on around the neighborhood.”

Pritchett lives near a vacation rental and said he has seen up to

25 cars in front of the house, and he has seen the negative side of short-term rentals. The property owner lives about two hours away and could not get there promptly if there was an issue, he said.

Connie Crawford, Pritchett’s neighbor, said traffic from the rental home became an issue, especially when emergency vehicles needed to come to the neighborhood and that loud music and houseboats were also creating problems.

“When we live right next door and all this is going on, who do we call?” she said.

Commissioner Jeff Stowe said after the hearing that complaints about vacation rentals could be reported to the Hall County Marshal’s Office, which can be reached during business hours at 770-531-6762.