

Town Council hears pros, cons of AirBnB's

Public hearing held on proposed ordinance

BY MILES LAYTON
Staff Writer

Edenton is in the process of reviewing and revising a proposed ordinance that seeks to codify regulations regarding short term rentals and AirBnB businesses.

During a recent public hearing before Town Council, Cynthia Harding and Anne Edwards voiced their opinions regarding the matter that has long been percolating up through Town Hall. The hearing was held as part of the Nov. 12 council meeting.

Harding's family has a short-term rental above the garage at their Court Street home. She asked that any proposed law, when considering any potential noise problems, utilize the police department versus the homeowner as the first point of contact to get the matter resolved.

She also said potential renters may not necessarily pay attention to some of the regulations' finer points, such as the noise ordinance or dealing with trash removal with regard to the listing.

Harding continued, "People say we want to level the playing field between these short-term rentals and the traditional bed-and-breakfasts. What I want to stress is that when we have guests stay, I ask them, 'Where else did you look?' They are typ-

ically not looking at the hotels, because they want to be in town or at the traditional BnB's because they want a kitchen or they are bringing a family. If you go on the websites of all of our traditional bnb's, they will say 'no children.' So if you've got someone traveling with a young child, a bnb is not an option. If they want to stay in town, they have to look into an AirBnB or short-term rental."

Harding said short-term rentals allow people a better means of lodging as they explore the area, perhaps with the intent to move to Edenton. Those folks like to stay in a neighborhood and see what it's like to live in town.

"The clientele that we've had, while we've had fine, fine people, they have a different purpose, a different need out of their stay, so that's why they are drawn to these short-term rentals. That's something to consider as well," she said.

Harding thanked policymakers/shapers for crafting the ordinance, but she hoped it "could be seen with clear eyes and without bias toward traditional bnb's because this market that we serve is a valuable one. The people who come here eat at our restaurants, shop in our stores, come to our special events — they are contributing in other ways to the town of Edenton. We hear about the nuisance things, but I want to make sure everyone knows about the benefits to the town as

well."

Anne Edwards, of King Street, also gave an impassioned speech about the short-term rental issue. Edwards said she is not against AirBnB in town and has known folks who have run these places for many years without complaint. She said the things that have made these AirBnB's successful is that they all share three things are first, lots of space around their properties; second, offer off-street parking; third, on-site management who is there all the time to monitor matters.

Edwards said however, her goal is encourage council to table any consideration for approving any short-term rental ordinance.

"Edenton is special and does not deserve, in my opinion, to have an ordinance that is sort of passed on, that we can't figure it out; it's too complicated; to have it turned into every other city or town across the globe that has the ability to introduce AirBnB rentals because there are people who are money-grubbing for their own profit for their own operation, and for a town or city that thinks it can garner a few coins on bed tax or tax paying visitor dollars," she said.

Edwards then shared her experience with AirBnB so as to better explain the effects of a short-term rental ordinance. She said soon after her neighbor's house sold, there was a loud party in September.

"Their behavior, especially the noise, rivaled anything that I have seen at any of the fraternity parties I attended in my youth," Edwards said. "Keep in mind that these party-hearties are 13 feet away from my home. A friend of mine who is a football fan said, 'Golly, the space between you and the place next door is not enough to make a first down.' I thought about calling the police to report the disturbance, but I didn't because for all I knew, these were the children and friends of my neighbors, thus not a great way to welcome new folks to the neighborhood."

Another weekend, Edwards said, there was another loud party with six older adults on the screen porch who were carrying on all weekend until 2:15 a.m. Sunday morning. Edwards said she was close enough to hear a man with a cough so bad that she imagined he could have spewed his lungs on her side yard. Edwards said for the same reasons as the party with the 20-somethings, she didn't call the police on this older group of partygoers.

Edwards later learned that the house next to her had been turned into an AirBnB.

Employing a West Virginia mining reference, "Being the canary in the coal mine — a bird who smells noxious fumes and dies to protect the coal miners — I'm telling you that I've had

some pretty noxious smells going on; this canary (pointing to herself) has suffered."

Edwards again stressed that she is not anti-AirBnB, but offered some suggestions about how to strengthen the proposed ordinance. She asked policymakers to look into neighborhood density as it relates to proximity of houses to one another. Edwards suggested that potential AirBnB owners get written permission from neighbors before setting up shop.

Per parking, Edwards took a page from Virginia Beach which prohibits parking on the streets by the AirBnB, but directs travelers to park in public parking spaces. Also maybe, policymakers should consider restricting the type of vehicle that can be parked on the street.

Edwards spoke of a giant rental truck that was taking up two parking spaces by her house. She said the visitors were not tourists, but filmmakers who may be staying for an extended period of time. Thus, Edwards said commercial usage for AirBnB should also be taken into consideration when crafting the ordinance.

Edwards said control is dubious because AirBnB is more a thing on the Internet, less a local business that can be affected by input from various stakeholders and town regulatory bodies. Policy determines enforcement capabilities, particularly with absentee property management.

"Where is your conscience? How dare this town expect me and others like me as long-term property-tax-paying citizens of this town to sacrifice our parking spaces, to sacrifice our peace of mind, no noise, in favor of these people who own this and don't even live here," she said.

Edwards noted her struggles living next to a place owned by out-of-towners who might rent space to by packing guests back to back. She noted problems that may arise because of crime, potential for fraud and unscrupulous business practices. As Edwards compared the price tag for a night at an AirBnB versus the lower priced traditional long-term rental, she pondered whether the town's cost-benefit analysis takes into consideration the townfolk.

"Edenton — is it for sale? Is it for sale against those of us who live here and love it?" she said. "Is that what you want — Edenton for sale — give up your control? A lack of enforcement? What can you do? Where is your conscience about those of us who have lived here forever, who have invested in Edenton, who pay our property taxes, who try to obey the rules of local control — are you just going to throw that away and allow people to come in who don't even live here and make money off of your town? Is that what you want? I don't think so."

ELECTION

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have the opportunity to decide if those qualifications are enough to return me to office for a second term in the Senate. It continues to be an honor and a privilege to represent the good and hard working people of the District I humbly and lovingly serve."

En route to an important law enforcement conference in Elizabeth City early Tuesday morning, Goodwin said, "I've learned a lot from my time in the General Assembly, but there's more work to be done and I feel confident that I can do it. I hope the good voters of NC House 1 like the way they are being represented in the state house and choose to re-elect me to continue the work for our state and district."

The filing period continues through Dec. 20.

In Chowan County, Republican Alex Kehayes, a former county commissioner, filed for the District 2 seat on the Chowan Board of Commissioners now held by Patti Kersey. Kersey has said she does not plan to seek re-election.

"I running to continue the sound policies fiscally for our county," Kehayes said. "We're entering a time where we will need to make decisions regarding a school. I'm graduate of John A. Holmes High School and education is something I'm interested in."

Also in Chowan, Republicans Chris Evans and Michael Dean filed to run for the at-large seat now held by Commissioner Don Faircloth, a Democrat.

"After confirmation that our current at-large Commissioner will not seek re-election, and after several conversations and encouragement, it is my

honor to announce that I will be seeking the office of Chowan County Commissioner," Evans said. "I am asking everyone to please pray and please consider casting your vote for me when the elections are held. I look forward seeking all the support I can as I commit to working for the good of everyone in our county. I look forward receiving input from each of you as I seek the office of Commissioner-at-large."

Dean said his motto is "service above all" and he feels his success in business coupled with ample time to serve all people in Chowan County is a big plus.

"I have some ideas for this county that I will share with commissioners even if I don't succeed. But if I do, I'll go after it like a pit bull on a steak," Dean posted to social media shortly after filing as a candidate.

District 3 commission

seat that is currently held by Democrat Greg Bonner is up for election too.

Meanwhile, 170 legislative seats are up for grabs. Democrats will have a chance to take control of the General Assembly. Republicans have a 65-55 majority in the House and a 29-21 edge in the Senate.

If Democrats oust enough Republicans to take charge of one or both chambers, then Democrats will have a much bigger role in the process of drawing new legislative and congressional maps after the 2020 Census figures are out.

Several state Supreme Court contests are set, with Chief Justice Cheri Beasley, a Democrat, facing a challenge from Republican Associate Justice Paul Newby. Two other incumbent Democratic justices are seeking a full eight-year term.

Democrats hold a 6-1

majority on the court. But if Republicans sweep the three contests, the GOP may hope to swing one Democrat, perhaps centrist Justice Sam Ervin IV, to win majority votes on some divisive issues.

President Trump will cast a large shadow over the state races.

"There is a strong and increasing correlation between how votes in a state are cast for president and for down-ballot offices," John Dinan, political science professor at Wake Forest University, said.

The relationship is especially strong for U.S. senate races, Dinan added.

The Democratic Party has its sights on flipping a number of U.S. Senate seats. Democrats will have to pick up three seats to take control of the Senate. Several House seats held by Republicans are also the target of Democrats looking to

strengthen their hold on the chamber.

In the Democratic Party's crosshairs is U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis. The fate of the senator from North Carolina may well be tied to Trump, Dinan said.

"In every U.S. Senate election held around the country in 2016, the winner of the Senate election aligned with the presidential election outcome in that state ... If Donald Trump carries North Carolina in 2020 there is a very good chance that Thom Tillis will win re-election."

While there's a connection between the presidency and lower-ballot elections, Dinan said, the governor's election is an exception to that rule.

"Governors are the main officials who are still assessed by voters on their own record, and to some degree independently of voter behavior in presidential elections," Dinan said.

BUSES

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vehicular area shall bring that other vehicle to a full stop and shall remain stopped. The driver of the other vehicle shall not proceed to move, pass, or attempt to pass the school bus until after the mechanical stop signal has been withdrawn, the flashing red stoplights have been turned off, and the bus has started to move.

King advises folks who pass a stopped school bus to pull over and call the non-emergency number 252-482-4444 so as to let dispatchers know.

School buses are equipped with cameras that record the coming and going of motorists.

"We are entrusted with the most precious possession a parent has, their children," Goodwin said. "Our school system takes that responsibility very seriously and we investigated every violation that occurs.



This screenshot from a bus video shows a vehicle passing a stopped Edenton-Chowan Schools bus. Every bus in the school system is equipped with these cameras.

We are fortunate that every one of our buses are equipped with interior and exterior high definition

cameras to capture vehicle make and model, license plate numbers and a visual of the driver."

Safety is priority No. 1 for Edenton-Chowan Schools.

"Parents and students deserve to know that when the bus arrives to pick them up or drop them off that they are going to be safe," Goodwin said. "No one wants to contact a parent whose child has been hurt or worse because of the negligence of another person."

Goodwin asks motorists to be alert and to think about others.

"We ask that the public

be mindful of our school buses and as soon as you glimpse of one of them to automatically look for the yellow lights to warn you they are preparing to make a bus stop or for the red lights to tell you that they are at a bus stop and are preparing to have a student load or unload from the bus," she said. "Our students are someone's child, nieces or nephews, cousins, or grandchildren and when it comes to a child's life we can't be complacent or distracted."

COUNTY

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and costs around \$1,200 annually will aid with the tracking of purchase, project and support requests.

Also, commissioners adopted a resolution authorizing a lease of county-owned personal property, a portion of that certain space on Chowan County's Central Communications Radio Tower, located at 100 W. Freemason Circle, Edenton. The lease of the above-described real property to T-Mobile Northeast LLC, is for up to 25 years, with a minimum term of 15 years and a maximum of 25.

Cha-ching — compensation to the county shall be provided annual rental of \$24,000.

In other matters, Commission Chairwoman Patti Kersey was re-elected to lead the commission in 2020 and Commissioner Bob Kirby was elected as vice-chairman.

Also, there was a retirement recognition for Terry Parks' service with the county's Department of Social Services.

Lastly, county employees were recognized for years of service. To see these photos, see the Chowan Herald's Facebook page.

5-Year Anniversary: Carol Copeland, Register of Deeds; Louann Fisher,

Animal Control; Justin Gray, Sheriff's office; Stacy Hoggard, Department of Social Services; Kristen Jones, Central services; Holly Pierce, Sheriff's office; Melissa Radke, Tax office; Justin Saez, Sheriff's office; Sharon Valentine, DSS; Annette Ward, EMS

10-Year Anniversary:

Lisa Armstrong, DSS; Colin Ryan, EMS

15-Year Anniversary: Tina Broome, DSS; Shelia Russell, Sheriff's office; Daryl Slade, Detention center

20-Year Anniversary: Brian Chappell, Recreation Department; Christopher Keeter, Detention center;

Lesla Nolen, Water Department; Kenneth Pierce, Inspections; Keri Thrasher, Central office

25-Year Anniversary: Dennis Rankins, Recreation Department; Cheryl White, DSS

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