



## STAFF REPORT

Agenda Title: Town of Woodfin Special (Town Hall) Meeting Discussion

Presenter: Shannon Tuch

Staff contact(s): Shannon Tuch

Meeting Date: July 19, 2022

---

### Summary:

Staff analysis and request for direction regarding feedback received from the community during the recently held special (town hall) meeting held on June 28, 2022. A number of recommendations are proposed for the Commission's consideration.

### Background:

The Woodfin Board of Commissioners convened a special meeting on June 28, 2022 and invited the community to attend and provide comments on a variety of topics. The meeting was held at the Woodfin Community Center with all members of the commission in attendance, along with key management staff. Approximately 50-60 residents also attended the meeting with 26 individuals providing comment, a summary of which is attached to this report. The meeting was not live-streamed.

### Staff Analysis:

Comments received by the community have been organized into five general categories including:

- Town Hall / Town Center
- Town Identity
- Short-term Rentals (STRs)
- Growth Management & the Environment
- Other

In reviewing the specific comments provided, staff recommends the following:

**Town Hall / Town Center / Town Identity.** Share the community feedback with the consultants for both the **Town of Woodfin comprehensive plan update** and the **Town Hall needs & feasibility study** currently planned for this year. This feedback should be used to help inform goals, objectives and strategies across multiple focus areas. Additionally, town identity may be further explored and supported through the work of other groups such as a Town of Woodfin business association.

**Growth Management & the Environment.** Continue to review town ordinances and policies for needed updates and improvements that would support sensible private development that considers environmental and community impacts and update on a case-by-case basis, and/or as part of a larger update guided by the town's comprehensive plan. In addition, town staff should continue to collaborate with our community partners on strategic public investments (i.e. sidewalks/greenways, water/sewer infrastructure, etc.) that promote sustainable growth.

**Short-term Vacation Rentals (STRs).** The greatest amount of public comment at the meeting revolved around the subject of STRs. Since the rapid rise of Airbnb and other similar on-line rental platforms, communities around the country have been struggling to understand and balance the impacts and benefits of the new use, and what regulatory options can be considered to help manage negative consequences. Given western North Carolina’s appeal to visitors and vacationers, and based on the personal accounts, information and ideas shared in the meeting, staff recommends consideration of the following:

1. Develop a resource for community members clearly communicating the types of lodging permitted in the town and where they may be located, along with applicable permitting requirements.
2. Proactively update STR/homestay regulations that will preserve a reasonable income opportunity for residents, while preserving neighborhood harmony and quality of life in the town’s residential areas. These regulations may include things such as:
  - Remove STRs as an option in all residential zoning districts, while broadly allowing homestays.
  - Limit homestay permits to one per owner, individual, or LLC.
  - Build an inventory of all lawfully established, pre-existing STRs in residential districts.
  - Review standards for homestays and update as needed to address nuisance concerns (i.e. parking).
3. Preserve opportunity for future housing and support policies for affordable housing:
  - Limit STRs to certain commercially zoned areas where lodging is desired and remove them from areas where housing is needed/wanted.
  - Encourage Conditional Zoning and/or support affordable housing programs to secure affordable units.
  - Study town owned property for affordable housing development opportunities.
4. Avoid regulations that are not specifically authorized by the state of North Carolina, including:
  - STR rental registrations.
  - Requiring affordable units (“Inclusionary zoning”) in new residential developments.
  - Impact fees.
5. Avoid regulations that are costly, inequitable, or impractical to administer:
  - Applying a minimum stay.
  - Capping the number of rentals.
  - Capping the number of guests.
  - Short-term renting allowed only after a designated period of long-term renting.
6. Continue to explore available data to understand extent of STRs in Woodfin (i.e. [Airdna 28804](#)).

**Advisory Body Recommendation:**

N/A.

**Process and Timeline (STRs):**

- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| • Present report, receive BOC direction    | July 19, 2022    |
| • Research & Analyze                       | July – Aug. 2022 |
| • Present amendments to the Planning Board | Sept.- Oct. 2022 |
| • Present amendments to the BOC            | Oct. – Nov. 2022 |

**Budget Impact:**

Unless otherwise recommended by the Board of Commissioners, staff recommends limiting regulation and enforcement to existing staff and already budgeted resources.

**Requested Action & Suggest Motion:**

This report is informational only. Staff is seeking direction on next steps.

**Attachments:**

- 1) Meeting Summary

# Town Hall Meeting Summary

June 28, 2022

Woodfin Community Center

## **Attendees:**

- Woodfin Board of Commissioners incl. Mayor Vebaun and Commissioners McAllister, Edgerton, Ervin, Butler, Thornton, and Lunsford.
- Town Staff incl. Ryan Vinson, Shannon Tuch, Adrienne Isenhower, Chief Michael Dykes, Sheri Powers
- Approximately 50+ residents/members of the public

## **Welcome:**

- Mayor Vebaun opens the meeting at 5:01 p.m. and turns the mic over to Comm. McAllister to get things started.
- Comm. McAllister introduces the BOC, explains the purpose of the meeting, and how the meeting will be conducted. JM highlights items of interest incl.
  - Need for Town Center/Town Hall
  - Feedback on STVRs
  - Future of the Comm. Center
  - Growth & Development

## **Public Comment:**

26 individuals provided comment. A summary of topics and comments includes:

## **Town Center/Town Hall:**

- Reynold's Village is already a town center – infrastructure is already in place for growth
- WVL Hwy hasn't changed much over the years
- Not sure Reynold's Village is the right place for a town center
- Unclear where money for a new town hall would come from
- Town plans to pursue a Needs & Feasibility study this year; study will identify and evaluate potential sites, then can develop a cost estimate and look at funding options; new building construction would have to be financed over many years
- Could have a satellite town center down by the river
- Woodfin doesn't have an existing downtown/main street, so it may make more sense to have multiple town centers in various areas of the town (Merrimon, Riverfront, Reynold's, etc.)
- Certain parts of town have limitations (i.e. WVL Hwy.) – may want to survey private property that could be redeveloped for a new town hall/town center
- The Town of Woodfin currently controls property - could rebuild on property we already have
- A new town hall should be attractive and inviting; issues with no one answering the door at current town hall
- A community center with an amphitheater and communal arts space is needed
- Town facilities need to come with a plan for maintenance – shouldn't have to start over with something brand new
- Town should look at grant opportunities
- Should encourage safe pedestrian access; need for safe pedestrian crossings on Riverside Dr. to new parks

### **Town Identity:**

- Should focus on creating a sense of place through wayfinding and welcome to Woodfin signage
- Need to create an identity/brand
- Woodfin is competing with AVL – need a brand that sets us apart
- Need a business association to market/brand the town
- Need someone (or a group) focused on economic development & business recruitment
- An interactive and accessible map could be used by visitors (and residents) to highlight town history and key sites – use QR code for people to access info remotely

### **Short-term Rentals (STRs):**

- 32% of revenues collected for rentals go to “guest services” and occupancy taxes
- Through an act by the General Assembly, occupancy taxes [in Buncombe County] go to the Tourism Development Authority (TDA) to further promote tourism and do not come back to towns or cities to support infrastructure. There have been some efforts to reform how occupancy taxes are distributed, but they have stalled.
- Nuisance issues reported with STRs included general disruption of neighborhood harmony but also issues that come with large groups of unrelated people and/or events (i.e. weddings) that draw large crowds. Specific disturbances noted included:
  - Noise/sleep disturbance
  - drinking/partying/mischief
  - negligence (unattended outdoor fires)
  - inadequate off-street parking (on-street parking of cars overwhelming the street)
  - large truck traffic making deliveries, etc.
  - Inadequate/undersized septic for large groups
- Other concerns cited included:
  - Concern over loss of housing and housing stability (no housing for the people who work in the area); “We live in a tourist economy, and if we don’t provide housing then we are hurting the industry”.
  - lack of controls, either through private restrictions or through town ordinances
  - Misleading marketing where more STRs are added than originally described - no recourse
- Benefits of STRs were also mentioned including that the income provided helps to supplement income and supports housing stability
- If proper oversight is provided, nuisance issues can be minimized
- We should try to find the balance that allows residents to benefit from STRs; support for sensible regulation
- Community harmony can be achieved with housing diversity that includes both homestays and STRs
- Ideas to help address concerns included:
  - Provide clear information on what is currently allowed, and what isn’t
  - Differentiate between whole house STRs and Homestays
  - Require a minimum stay
  - Limit the number of STRs permitted in one area
  - Limit the number per owner
  - Eliminate whole house vacation rentals (only allow homestays)
  - Only allow STRs in commercial districts
  - Require a certain number of affordable housing units with new developments [inclusionary zoning]

- Need an STR czar
- Town officials have been trying to get a sense of how much of a concern STRs – sounds like this is a high priority [applause]

#### **Growth Management & the Environment:**

- Woodfin (and WNC) will become a climate refuge – need to move faster to prepare for influx
- Don't allow high intensity uses in steep slope or other environmentally sensitive areas; should have the least impact to the environment but also on the neighbors
- If we want to promote growth, we must plan appropriately for infrastructure needed to support that growth
- Please save the trees [applause]
- Should promote sensible development standards that support pollinators and minimize light pollution; town has already done a lot and adopted a native plant list to be used on town property, and a dark sky ordinance
- Need more bike and ped infrastructure (greenways, ped crossings, sidewalks, bike paths); particular concern along Riverside Dr. with new parks

#### **Other:**

- Would love a map of Woodfin on the website
- There are additional opportunities for the community to learn more and provide input including monthly Board of Commissioner meetings – liked former practice of a quarterly “state of the town” talks
- Want to welcome newcomers
- Out of state developers do not care about the people who live here, they are not interested in helping address problems
- Asheville is the most expensive city to live in in the state

Mayor thanks everyone for coming out. Encourages everyone to attend meetings or watch at home.

Meeting is adjourned 6:27 p.m.