

# TOWN OF SEABROOK ISLAND

Town Council Work Session

May 10, 2022 – 1:00PM

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## MINUTES

### 1. Call to Order – Roll Call – Pledge of Allegiance- Freedom of Information

Mayor Gregg called the May 10, 2022, Town Council Work Session at 1:00PM. Councilwomen Finke and Fox, Councilmen Goldstein and Kortvelesy, Town Administrator Cronin, Zoning Administrator Newman, and Town Clerk Watkins participated in the meeting. The Town Clerk confirmed that notice of the meeting was properly posted, and the requirements of the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act had been met.

### 2. Mayor John Gregg

- Update Concerning Main Road Corridor Segment C

Mayor Gregg noted Charleston County Public Works is seeking public input concerning proposed alternatives for improving Johns Island roads in an area designated as Main Road Corridor Segment C (area bounded by portions of Maybank Highway, Bohicket Road and River Road). The next public meeting is scheduled for May 12 and the deadline for submitting comments is May 27. Comments may be submitted online at:

<https://www.mainroadcorridor.com/segment-c/vpim-2/>

Council clarified that multiple projects can be selected for comment through the Charleston County public comment portal, if the link should be submitted to Tidelines, and this public comment portal is not about the I-526 extension.

Council discussed if they should show support of one of the options for the improvement of the roads on Johns Island by resolution at the upcoming Town Council Meeting.

### 3. Town Council Members:

- **Jeri Finke**
  - Short-term Rental Ad Hoc Committee Report with Councilwoman Fox

Councilwoman Finke presented a prepared statement about the Short -Term Rental Ad Hoc Committee findings as follows:

“Thank you, Mr. Mayor ...

I have one topic for today – and that is the formal presentation to Council of the report from the *Ad Hoc* Committee on Short-Term Rentals. It was included in the announcement of today's agenda that was publicized yesterday, so the report is not only now available to Council but to all of Seabrook Island.

In presenting the report, the first, and some of the most important comments I will make today, is a series of thank yous. First, to my cohort on the committee, Councilwoman Fox. The report is presented today because of her determination and patience, with both the issue and her patience with me. I could elaborate but let me just summarize by saying that the Town is more than lucky to have her working for them.

Thanks also go to all the many stakeholders who were willing to take considerable time to meet with the Committee over the last 6 months. We had meetings nearly every Friday starting back in November, sometimes more often during a week, and often those meetings went for 2-3 hours.

Thanks also to the staff, management, and boards of SIPOA and the Club, also SIUC, who helped extract and assemble information from their records, and then helped the Committee talk through how that data demonstrated what has and is going on here on the island versus the misperceptions and misinformation that were the impetus for the research and this report.

And finally, thank you to Town staff. Katharine Watkins, our Town Clerk, was there every time we needed scheduling help, FOIA clarification, etc. Joe Cronin, our Town Administrator; and Tyler Newman, our Zoning Administrator and Chief Code Enforcement Officer. Joe and Tyler sat in on nearly every meeting and shared their expertise. Tyler's participation is going to be even more significant as Council continues to address the issue and enforce the provisions of the Town's existing STR ordinance.

And then there is Joe, who spent hours and hours pulling numbers together for the Committee and helping us analyze their meaning; and then he has a magic touch of transforming that information into understandable charts and graphs. He not only dug through Town records, but he probably was the most frequent visitor as of late to the County's website to sort through tax records, residency status, and other information. Joe did not (may be does not) always agree with the direction of the report – I think he rather freaked when he saw the first draft and how long it was – which at the time was half its final length. But Joe helped guide the Committee's discussions, made sure we did not step outside the bounds of the Town's jurisdiction and State law, gave us lots of options to ponder (many of which are included in an addendum to the report), and finally he let the report be the Committee's report.

So, with all that said, I want to take a bit of time to actually talk about the report. I read through, many times, the presentations to Council, the petition, the emails and letters, and our meeting notes, and made a list of the claims made against short-term rental activity. That was the outline for the report.

Pat and I decided that we would try to respond to each of the claims that were being repeated over and over. Even if it was an issue outside the Town's jurisdiction, we thought it important to do our due diligence on every concern we could. We note that many times in the report.

I think that approach alone responds to the accusations that we were not listening, that we haven't paid attention, that we are ignoring constituents, and (my personal favorites) that we are "clueless" and that we are elected officials who "do not care about their community." Just as a heads up, Pat and I do live here fulltime. Pat probably has a history on Seabrook Island longer than most anyone.

So, the report we present to Council today is a detailed narrative, walking through all the claims and charges made against rental activity on the island. It looks at the issue from many aspects; we tried to use every metric that we could find to analyze the island's rental activity. The report ends with 7 conclusions and a list of 9 recommendations for Council, and also other policy changes that are listed as possibilities without the Committee's endorsement.

To summarize the conclusions – a) You can't complain about how bad the last two years have been without naming the pandemic and acknowledging the worldwide impact of COVID-19, including here on Seabrook Island; b) You can't ignore the planned development of the island and the resulting inevitable, documented growth in its population; c) You can't dismiss the efforts of the Town to date on regulating rentals; you can't dismiss that there have been few formal complaints to either the Town or SIPOA about disruptive rental activity, and then claim enforcement is not working when there have been few complaints; and d) You can't review the real numbers in the report and then still support the petition's claim that short-term rentals are out of control – it is the petition's basis and it is outright misinformation – there has not been "uncontrolled growth of short-term rentals."

The most significant recommendation the report makes to Council is the adoption of a 20% cap on rental permits to properties zoned single-family residential (similar to the cap imposed on Kiawah). The Committee made this recommendation notwithstanding the data indicating it is not needed, but to respond to community concerns, and be ready in the event the data suddenly trends differently. It is a backstop that I do not expect will be needed and is high enough compared to present rental activity that it should have no impact on property values and lock out any property rights of current or future owners.

I don't want to go and on, but after 6 months focused on getting to this report – and actually spending more than two years focused on researching and understanding the short-term rental market, I want to say that it has all brought me around to being, today, incredibly sad.

And I speak personally here, not for the Committee, not for Pat.

A small group of people, last summer were upset, perhaps legitimately frustrated over some incident, but they decided everyone should share in their frustration. They took an emotional issue – your home, preserving your home – which we all understand. Then they again, and again, and again, and again said short-term rentals were out of control and anything that has frustrated you the last couple of years can be blamed on those renters, and their presence threatens your home. It's the tactic of "say something loud and often enough it must be true." But sadly, they had no data to back up the claim. If you read anything in the report, look at page 19.

So, I am sad that the Preserve Seabrook group has done the opposite of its name. It has divided the community. It has managed to convince a group of Seabrooker's that their quality of life is miserable because of renters. I am sad when I hear how people approach strangers and actually tell them that "we have no more room for renters, and you're not welcome here." I'm sad because that was not the culture of Seabrook Island before Preserve Seabrook existed.

I am sad that when someone tells me that I don't appreciate the island and don't deserve to live here (and actually said in worse terms), and I feel like I have to lock my front door for the first time since the house was built 11 years ago.

And I am sad for the people who are so obsessed with this issue that they seemingly can't enjoy this beautiful, unique island because they are always looking for some example of a bad renter. I am really sad for them.

I have no delusions that this report will be accepted by everyone, especially not by the petition authors and their hard-core supporters. I'm ready for their continued vitriol, subtle as it may be, but I'm satisfied that Pat and I have been thorough and fair and done the work asked of us by the Mayor last fall.

And with that, Mr. Mayor, I'll yield the floor to Councilwoman Fox."

Councilwoman Fox then provided brief remarks regarding the committee's findings.

Council thanked the Committee for their hard work on the report, and all those who participated and were involved with the report.

Council discussed the recommendations presented by the committee and how a cap would impact the island and potential implementation of the committee's recommendations.

Council discussed and clarified it is expected that the Seabrook Island Property Owners Association (SIPOA) will be updating their regulations with regards to short-term rentals, noting SIPOA controls access through the gate and the amenities provided to those properties behind the gate. Councilwoman Finke clarified SIPOA has some workshops and meetings regarding short-term rentals.

- **Patricia Fox**

Councilwoman Fox updated council on the recent communications from the Town in the Seabrooker and Tidelines.

Councilwoman Fox summarized the April Community Promotions Engagement and Promotions Committee and the recent SIPOA long-range planning committee meeting.

- **Barry Goldstein**

Councilman Goldstein summarized the May Public Works meeting for the Seabrook Island Road improvements and the proposal for the new garage at Town Hall.

- **Dan Kortvelesy**

Councilman Kortvelesy reminded council the Disaster Recovery Committee will be meeting on June 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> for emergency preparedness sessions based on a scenario of severe flooding.

Councilman Kortvelesy noted the upcoming Seabrooker article for June will be related to hurricane preparedness.

Councilman Kortvelesy further noted June 17<sup>th</sup> is Disaster Awareness Day at the Town of Kiawah from 9:30-1:00 at Turtle Point.

#### **4. Town Administrator Joe Cronin**

- DSO Public Hearing: May 17, 2022 (2:30 PM)

Town Administrator Cronin reminded all the public hearing will take place on May 17<sup>th</sup> at 2:30 PM.

Town Administrator Cronin added the Town has placed signs and mailed post cards to all owners of records in the Town. The draft document posted on the website: enacting ordinance, text of the DSO, and zoning map. [www.townofseabrookisland.org/dso](http://www.townofseabrookisland.org/dso). Comments can be made through the comment portal on the website and will be accepted in writing by mail or email. Comments submitted by mail or email will be made available to Council prior to the meeting.

Town Administrator Cronin added there are two ways to participate in the upcoming public hearing: to come to Town Hall or participate via zoom.

Council clarified if the public hearing would follow the same procedures as the Town has during previous meetings for recognition of persons participating via video conference to be recognized for comment.

Council discussed having the Town Administrator summarize the overall history for the revision of the Town's Development Standards Ordinance prior to the opening the floor for public comments.

Council clarified if questions and comments will be accepted after the public hearing on May 17<sup>th</sup> and if Council can discuss the comments presented after the public hearing has concluded.

- Action Items for May 24<sup>th</sup> Meeting

- o Ord. 2022-04: An ordinance to repeal and replace the Town of Seabrook Island Development Standards Ordinance ("DSO"); to repeal and replace the Town of Seabrook Island Zoning Map; and to repeal conflicting provisions from the Town Code for the Town of Seabrook Island

Town Administrator summarized the final steps for the adoption of Ordinance 2022-04.

## 5. Adjourn

Councilwoman Finke Moved to adjourn; Councilman Kortvelesy seconded. All voted in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 2:16PM.

Date: May 13, 2022

Prepared by: *Katharine E. Watkins*  
Town Clerk/Treasurer