



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021

## NFTHA Questions City Administration's and City Council's Priorities.

Niagara Falls, NY — At the May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021 City Council meeting, two groups addressed the Council with their concerns.

The first group of neighbors from LaSalle were upset because one of the houses on their block is a Short-Term Rental (STR, Airbnb) and they see people coming to the house who are “strangers” and different than they are. One resident complained that guests had a “Mexican fiesta” and made noise during the day while enjoying the pool at the rental. Another said these “strangers” had her so worried she needed to go get her gun permit. The house they are complaining about is a legal STR and the operator is one of the highest rated hosts in the City. The operator does everything right; limiting the number of guests allowed on the property and keeping it in great shape. We are a tourist city, and we depend on the 8 million “strangers” coming to see the falls every year.

The second group of neighbors wanted the City to address the violence that surrounds Gluck Park and the stabbing murder of a 17-year-old in the park. Besides asking for help, they brought ideas and solutions to the Council.

After hearing pleas from citizens for a safe place for their children to play and to provide community policing the city did NOT call for an emergency Special Council meeting to address the violence that is plaguing our city. Instead, the city called an emergency Special City Council meeting to address the “problem” of STRs.

### **Some Background:**

Since the current ordinance 1328.13 Short-Term Rental Units was approved in April of 2017, the Niagara Falls Tourist Home Association (NFTHA) has tried repeatedly to work with the city to help enforce that ordinance to no avail. Illegal operators have abounded, and the city has failed to shut them down.

In January of 2020, the new Restaino Administration decided to do “something” about the STR situation despite there being no facts or statistics in evidence that STRs were a problem to our city. The only problem was the city's inability to enforce the current ordinance and to shut down illegal operators. Subsequently, the council issued a moratorium on all STRs until a comprehensive plan could be developed. Meanwhile, the ordinance on the books continued and continues to not be enforced. There are over 200 illegal operators.

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In 2020 the moratorium was extended two more times. From January to September 2020, people were denied the right to the legal use of their homes. In June 2020 a new ordinance was presented by the Mayor as a done deal. There was no collaboration with the NFTHA and other stakeholders. As such, it was full of problems and was subsequently rejected by both the Niagara County Planning Board and the City of Niagara Falls Planning Board.

In September 2020, with a few last-minute changes, the Mayor's ordinance was voted upon and defeated by City Council. The only changes he made were those that were blatantly illegal. Due to the rejection of the Planning Board, a unanimous vote was required to pass it.

During the Fall of 2020, the NFTHA Board worked to provide the City Council with a revised ordinance regarding STRs that took into account the city's, community's and operators needs. It was emailed to all City Council members in January of 2021 with a plea to work in collaboration this time and not be shut out of the process. The NFTHA is the expert in this area within the city. To date, there has been no follow up to collaborate by City Council.

Despite the lack of evidence that STRs are a real problem in this city, a Special Council Meeting was called at 5pm, Friday, May 28th to occur at 5pm on June 1st after the Memorial Day holiday. While the timing may not be a direct violation of the Open Meetings Law it is an ethical one.

In the meantime, another murder has occurred in Niagara Falls on Linwood Avenue. If you want City resources to be spent on preventing more senseless killings, tell Niagara Falls City officials they need to get their priorities straight. You can submit a general complaint online at [niagarafallsusa.org/citizen-action-line/#form/3158](https://niagarafallsusa.org/citizen-action-line/#form/3158), call the Mayor at 716-286-4310 and come to the emergency meeting at Niagara Falls City Hall Tuesday, June 1<sup>st</sup>, at 5pm. Bring signs, we will not be allowed to speak.