

**Short-term rental issues aired  
ISSUES...**

**MEETING:**

*Representative of tourism home association calls on officials to step up enforcement.*

**BY PHILIP GAMBINI**

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More than a year since the City of Niagara Falls created a law to regulate short-term rental properties, flaws in its enforcement and regulatory language are clearer and stakeholders want to see it amended before next year's tourist season.

Members of the Niagara Falls Tourist Home Association spoke to members of the city's Zoning Board of Appeals earlier this week, renewing their calls for more accountability to the ordinance the group helped write last year.

The group has also found new concerns, in particular the potential growth of short-term rentals operated under limited liability companies. It's an issue that unsettles politicians, officials and residential operators.

Seth Piccirillo, the city's director of the departments of code enforcement and community development, said the city already has documented problems dealing with long-term rentals owned by negligent landlords who use LLCs to cloak their identity.

"You want to know who owns these properties and who is going to responsible if there is an emergency at

See **ISSUES**, Page 5A

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

the property," Piccirillo said.

"To try to serve them in court for housing violations or anything that is happening from a quality of life standpoint is nearly impossible," he added.

Carroll Schultz Reetz, the association's president, said of the

legal accountability.

The existing law does not explicitly forbid LLC ownership of the short-term rentals, but Niagara Falls City Councilman Kenny Tompkins thinks it should.

"Most of your bad players form LLCs," he said. "Not all of them, but most."

Schultz Reetz said dealing with corporate ownership should be a point of discussion with the city council and officials as she and

"They're two separate issues, but I think both need to be addressed," he said.

Schultz Reetz said any discussions of implementing a bed tax on operators is premature.

The city should ensure that it is increasing its enforcement efficiency before considering the matter, or otherwise contribute to an established issue of equity among operators, Schultz Reetz said. Illegal operators are already evading certain financial burdens

115 rentals she has found available in the city, only 25 are legally permitted to operate.

“The issue is, it is so easy to list your place without doing any of the permitting,” she said.

She added that it allows operators to sidestep fire and building code requirements as well.

Schultz Reetz estimated there are between 15 and 20 short-term rentals owned by LLCs. She is also concerned about how the trend would impact

others push to update the legal language of the ordinance before the start of next summer.

In the updated law, Tompkins said he would advocate for: a ban of LLC ownership; stiffer financial penalties for non-compliance and the application of bed tax charges on shortterm rentals. He will prioritize stronger enforcement methods over the tax issue, he said.

that are part of the permitting process. She said implementing a bed tax, which could only be applied to permitted properties, would contribute to the issue.

“Until they get the (enforcement) problem solved, we would fight that bed tax,” she said of the association’s position.