Christine Armstrong’s statement to the Planning Commission, January 13, 2021

The Greensboro Planning Commission started to talk about STR’s two years ago when Dan Predpall was Chair and we started to write the updated bylaws after we had researched for, and had written, the Town Plan. At that time there were some general community conversations going on about what appeared to be a much larger number of homes being rented around the lake; more traffic; more homes were being bought just to be used as short term rentals; different guests coming and going every few days. Property taxes engendered by Act 60 were crushing second homeowners so it was no wonder -- then it became clear that revenues from STR's could be significant. It became apparent that Greensboro had gone the way of the rest of the world with the STR explosion---and the opportunity arose then, to weigh in on that, not least of all because STR’s were not businesses that were permitted in the Shoreland District and these home rentals were in violation of the existing town zoning bylaws. What had been an occasional home rental going on more or less under the radar had become so pervasive that it was impossible to ignore. We went before the Select Board to float the idea of Short Term Rental regulation before proceeding, and received the go ahead.

We had two choices then: either to enforce the existing town bylaw in the Shoreland District or to explore how to make it possible to allow STR’s in a manner that continued to respect the needs not only of the landlords but also of those property owners who live here and who don’t rent. We knew that folks outside the Shoreland District who rented their homes or rooms in their homes for less than 30 days, already had to apply to the town to operate a business in their homes--permitted businesses in districts where it already was a permitted activity. The Shoreland District should not be given exclusive treatment. And we saw the greatest number of STR’s were in the Shoreland District -- where, there was probably the most impact given the close quarters of the homes and the legacy wastewater systems.

We chose to support STR’s and to add a bylaw--by regulating them the Town actually makes unpermitted activity, permitted. Subsequently, we have learned that the State of Vermont has passed legislation that made not regulating STR’s with accompanying conditions, impossible. So even that debate became moot.

A subcommittee of the PC, together with a community member who rents her home on the lake, looked at a zillion STR bylaws in other communities. There are a number of ways to think about STR’s: there can be a huge registration fee; there can be a cap to the number of permits granted in a town; there can be a limit to the frequency with which the
landlord can turn over the property; there can be a limit to the districts in which the STR’s are allowed. We chose a lighter touch.

It is unclear how many STR’s exist in Greensboro, exactly. Website platform searches suggest maybe 50-60. The Dartmouth Study cited in our public information suggests 40 but simultaneously, in the same article, they recognize that the number is largely undercounted. On my road of approximately 30 homes, I can count 10 that are, or have been, STR’s. On Black’s Point where there are 21 homes, 7-9 are rented. Randolph Road has 7 or 8 rentals of the 30 or so homes. 6 of 16 on Blockhouse Hill rent. Homes off the lake that have rights-of-ways to the lake are rented more intensely than before resulting in more people and car traffic going to and from the lake.

We had a whole list of permitting conditions that we looked at and, after consultation with an attorney, chose the simplest: the State’s simple Self Certifying Form to post in an obvious spot in the rental; and the Greensboro Zoning Permit Application to deliver to the ZA.

The bylaw also has some special conditions just for the Shoreland District which include: minimum length of stay in the summer; no large destination type events; identified parking spaces; the requirement to rent the entire dwelling; shared dock usage considerations; no occupied RV’s or tents.* (We removed this condition at the last minute.) Personally, I advocated for a 7 day minimum stay in the Shoreland District and no minimum stay period outside the Shoreland District. We can shift the overnighters to local, full time community residents who rent for the income it provides, including the Highland Lodge.

I am 1,000% positive that there are plenty of smart folks out there who can dissect our proposed bylaw and application process and find fault or pieces not to their liking. Even I can, as evidenced by my previous statement that I prefer 7 day minimum rentals in the summer in the Shoreland District.

These were our two overarching questions: How do we balance the desire of folks to rent and the quality of life for those who do not? How can we meaningfully support compliance with the state’s wastewater occupancy laws in a more deliberate way?

I have to point out that degradation of an ecosystem may not shift directly or immediately into an obvious loss of ecosystem quality or benefits. Science tells us that ecosystems can sustain some level of degradation before reaching a tipping point after which their function declines (often quite fast, maybe irrevocably). I’m not keen on reaching that tipping point with either my Greensboro community ecosystem or with the lake ecosystem.

We hope that by constructing a STR bylaw that aligns with the State of Vermont’s current minimum requirements, the town can implement it most efficiently and that prospective landlords, some of whom who have identified
the proposed application process to be a burden, will have to exert minimum effort to comply. We would anticipate it being implemented January 1, 2022.