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REDINGTON SHORES

Town looks to control 'party house' rentals

By WAYNE AYERS
TBN Correspondent

REDINGTON SHORES — After months of discussion, the Town Commission gave initial approval to an ordinance regulating short-term rental properties. Its main intent is to control "party houses" where large groups of people gather and become loud and unruly. It does this by limiting the number of occupants in the house and parking spaces, restricting noise, and other regulations.

To rent the property, the owner is required to get a Certificate of Use from the town, which is taken away if three violations occur on the property within a year. If that happens, the property cannot be rented for a year. There are also fines of \$100 for the first offense, \$1,000 for the second, and \$2,500,

along with the revocation of the license, for the third offense within a year.

The owner has an incentive to avoid violations, by meeting the maximum occupancy rule and other requirements, and to rent to responsible people who will not be noisy or unruly.

If the owner obeys the rules on his own, enforcement will not be needed, which officials say is the intent of the ordinance.

The rental property regulations also say that rental contracts already existing when the law takes effect must be honored. A signed agreement to rent a home to a group larger than allowed under the new law would be valid. That could delay the ordinance's effect until those contracts run out.

Commissioner Michael Robinson

said he had "heard from a lot of people that are supportive of this."

"This is a laudable action plan to address this issue that is very helpful when the problem is a constant nuisance," said Salvatore Celeste. He said calling the police to report "25 screaming college kids is probably not going to be very effective."

Resident Leslie Coppock said, "I have no interest in calling the police. We want people to take care of their own businesses."

The vote was 2-1 for approval. Commissioners Robinson and Jennie Blackburn voted for the ordinance and Jeff Neal voted against. Mayor Mary Beth Henderson recused herself out of an abundance of caution because she owns a parcel that she rents out for vacation rentals.

In voting no, Neal said in general he liked the ordinance, but he would have preferred to wait until meetings were being held in person rather than on Zoom so more people might make comments. He also said he thought the ordinance changes could have been avoided "if we just would have been enforcing our own rules that we had in place."

A second and final public hearing on the ordinance will be held Aug. 12.

Securing of outdoor property

The commission approved an ordinance that required residents in the town "to secure outside property that could become airborne in high winds."

Robinson said the law takes

effect when the National Weather Service issues a high wind, tropical storm or hurricane warning, and also applies when residents are out of town and the property is left vacant. In those situations, outdoor property must be secured or brought inside, Robinson said.

Creation of the ordinance had been proposed by Robinson because of situations in the past where people, particularly seasonal residents, left town and their outdoor property would be blown into a neighboring property and cause damage. The intent is to get all residents to secure their property before a wind event. There are also provisions for securing property on construction sites.

Violation of the ordinance is considered a second-degree

misdemeanor, with a fine of up to \$500 and/or up to 60 days in prison.

Neal said a jail sentence "seems a little harsh" for people not securing their property.

"What do we look like as a town when we say, 'We're going to lock you up if you don't put your furniture away,'" Neal said. He said many residents agreed with him.

Town Attorney James Denhardt said penalties are included in the ordinance "to give it some teeth," but he had no objection to the jail sentence being removed.

Robinson amended an earlier motion to approve the ordinance, taking out "imprisonment for up to 60 days."

It passed unanimously on first reading and a second reading will be held Aug. 12.

INDIAN SHORES

Town's sidewalk project on hold

FDOT: Project too big to complete at present time; will revisit later

By SUZETTE PORTER
Tampa Bay Newspapers

CLEARWATER — Forward Pinellas Executive Director Whit Blanton provided an update on the Indian Shores Gulf Boulevard sidewalk project during the board's July 8 meeting.

Florida Department of Transportation and the town have agreed to drop the project for now; however, the town still wants to move forward with a sidewalk and drainage improvements in the future.

Blanton said the sidewalk project was bigger than what can be done at the present time; however, some of the problems the town is experiencing will be fixed as part of a FDOT's \$8 million drainage project currently underway in Indian Rocks Beach and Indian Shores.

One of the problems is ponding

of water in the shared bicycle and pedestrian lane after it rains. Pedestrians and bicyclists then move into Gulf Boulevard, which is a hazard. Blanton said the drainage project will fix about 70% of the ponding issues that result from regular storms, but not major events.

Blanton said FDOT wasn't able to work out a way to put in a vertical curb between Gulf Boulevard and the pedestrian/bicycle lane.

Instead, FDOT recommends using green pigment paint to mark the area for bicyclists and pedestrians similar to what is in use in the Redingtons, Madeira Beach and Treasure Island.

He said the green paint also would extend into Indian Rocks Beach. FDOT will add additional signage and pavement markings.

Indian Rocks Beach Mayor Cookie Kennedy said the green pigment had worked well in the areas where it had been used in St. Pete Beach and north along Gulf Boulevard.

"It's been successful," she said, adding that it was a good idea to use it even farther north on Gulf Boulevard.

She also said work should continue to look for more ways to improve safety.

Blanton said Indian Shores Mayor Patrick Soranno had rightly been a "bull dog" about the project, since it had been on the radar for almost 20 years and the sidewalk still hasn't been built.

Blanton said he understood that the primary reason was cost. He said an "old estimate" put it at \$15 million, but FDOT now says it could be as much as \$30 million.

Blanton recommends trying to get funding in the next few years to do a new Project Development and Environment Study, which he estimates would cost about \$500,000, to re-evaluate the project and come up with a viable, financially feasible option.

The sidewalk project would remain on Forward Pinellas' priority list, but there would be a better scope and cost estimate

available.

Putting in a curb in some areas along Gulf Boulevard in Indian Shores is hampered by lack of right-of-way. In those areas, it may be that an 8-foot sidewalk would be used for bicyclists and pedestrians with fast-traveling bicyclists using the main roadway, he said.

Blanton said Indian Shores will likely seek funding from the state for the sidewalk project and had invited members of the legislature to its July 9 meeting.

Blanton expressed concern about the town looking for a legislative earmark of funds. He said if money was allocated from the state before the re-evaluation, there was some risk that it won't be for what is needed.

If the money is approved, it would likely take away funding from other priority projects. And if the governor vetoes the money, it can't be revisited for a year.

Suzette Porter is TBN's Pinellas County editor. She can be reached at sporster@tbnweekly.com.

Community News



Photo by GENE STERN & KAREN MAIN
Pictured are, from left, David Buzza, president of the Seminole Lake Rotary; and Laura Connelly of North Pinellas Women's Club.

Local clubs partner for Books Across Pinellas project

SEMINOLE — The North Pinellas Woman's Club of General Federation of Women's Clubs recently partnered with Seminole Lake Rotary Club for a Books Across Pinellas project.

A book will be donated each week to Seminole Elementary School in honor of the Rotary guest speaker for the week. The first honoree was Laura Connelly, who spoke at the club meeting July 3 on the topic of international service.

Seminole Lake Rotary Club meets Fridays at 7:15 a.m. Guests are always welcome and can join the group in person at Chapel on the Hill, 12601 Park Blvd. N., Seminole. All CDC COVID-19 safety guidelines are followed.

The club also meets via Zoom at the same day and time for those not able to meet in person.

Family Fun Fishing day slated for Aug. 1

LARGO — The Kiwanis Club of Seminole Breakfast is hosting Family Fun Fishing on Saturday, Aug. 1, from 8 to 11 a.m. at Taylor Park, 1100 Eighth Ave. SW, Largo.

The event will provide for a family fun opportunity that will respect social distancing and other safety measures. The free event is for children 14 and younger.

The Kiwanis Seminole Breakfast Club provides the bait and fishing poles, but youngsters are welcome to bring their own gear if they wish. Prizes are given out for the first fish caught, most fish caught, smallest fish caught and more.

Donations are welcomed and used to help offset the cost of bait.

For more information, call Leah Hoffman at 727-873-7852.

Girls Inc. prepares for STEAM Programming

PINELLAS PARK — Girls Inc. of Pinellas will be launching its Full STEAM Ahead! programming for girls in kindergarten through 12th grade in the fall.

This fall 10 weeks of dedicated after-school programming is designed

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closing most of its stores, including its one in St. Petersburg.

And, unlike many other businesses, the pandemic has helped Sprouts' bottom line.

Net sales for the first quarter of 2020 were \$1.6 billion, a 16% increase compared to the same period in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic also increased demand dramatically during the latter part of the quarter, boosting net sales by about \$146 million.

Pang said one of the reasons the Phoenix-based Sprouts has succeeded where others have failed is its accessible atmosphere.

"I think what makes Sprouts stand out and what has gained a bit of the following in the area is kind of the approachability of the stores and the products," she said, noting that produce is at the center of the store that also includes a larger bulk section and vitamins and supplements department.

Pang said the store's 100-plus team members are another draw to customers.

"Even though Sprouts may be different to some shoppers, what really sets Sprouts apart, in addition to the welcoming environment, is our team members who go through extensive training and ongoing education to make sure they can help shoppers find the products they're looking for, help them navigate the store," she said.

Safety first

The pandemic has also led to more training for employees, who are required to wear masks.

"We're definitely talking more precautions and some extra training for our team members to make sure we can open up and provide a safe environment for our team members and shoppers to be in," she said. "So we are taking extra measures to make sure sanitation is increased at the store. We promote social distancing throughout the store, so encouraging people to keep that 6-foot distance, which is about two carts' length."

Stores have installed Plexiglass barriers at

registers to add protection for team members and customers.

"We're finding that people are kind of getting used to it (the safety precautions)," she said. "The store is really nice and open and airy, so it's easy to practice that social distancing throughout our stores."

Pang added Sprouts is committed to "zero waste," so the Seminole store will donate unsold and edible groceries to Feeding Tampa Bay through the grocer's Food Rescue program. The Sprouts Healthy Community Foundation also offers grants to local organizations to focus on nutrition access and education. In 2019, for instance, Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful received a grant for \$25,000.

To celebrate the new store, each shopper on opening day will receive a free reusable shopping bag with purchase. Local customers can also enter to win a \$500 Sprouts gift card by visiting sprouts.com/semole.

"We're expecting a lot of excited shoppers, but of course we're going to make sure everybody is safe," Pang said.

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they lost their job due to COVID-19 instead of having to provide a letter from their employer. The allowable amount of liquid assets, money

due to COVID-19, and \$5 million has been set aside to provide reimbursement grants up to \$10,000 to assist small business owners