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County Administrator addresses Senate Community Affairs committee

October 10, 2017 – Flagler County Administrator Craig Coffey and County Attorney Al Hadeed were in Tallahassee on Tuesday where Coffey addressed the Senate Community Affairs committee about vacation rentals on behalf of the Florida Association of Counties.

Casey Cook, with the Florida League of Cities, spoke before Coffey and referred to Flagler’s short-term vacation rental ordinance as “the model” for cities and other counties around the state.

“Flagler County held five or six public hearings plus stakeholders meetings,” Cook said. “Zoning is about balancing rights. Zoning is fundamentally local.”

Coffey explained that the ordinance – which was initially approved in February 2015 and subsequently amended the ordinance three times based on the stakeholders input that involved those both for and against short-term vacation rentals.

“I’ve been here 10 years (as Flagler County Administrator) and there have always been vacation rentals,” Coffey said. “It only became a problem after 2011 when property owners’ rights tipped to vacation rentals.”

Coffey cited the census saying the average occupancy of a single-family home in Flagler County is 2.5 people, and that homes rented to more than a dozen people destroyed property values for the neighboring homeowners.

“It got to where they couldn’t sell their homes,” he said. “They could only be marketed as vacation rentals.”

Coffey noted that Flagler County has only two code enforcement officers, and that the county ordinance does not regulate owner occupied rentals, condos, or rentals in rural areas (where noise and multiple cars are less likely to infringe on neighbors’ lifestyle).
“We did regulate for safety,” Coffey said. “Smoke detectors. Carbon monoxide detectors. Pool alarms. That’s what we are worried about.”

The court system and measures like the Bert J. Harris Private Property Rights Protection Act provides the checks and balances for those communities that place onerous restrictions which effectively limit the ability to have a short-term vacation rental property.

“I don’t want to inspect every house,” Coffey said, responding to a proposal from last year’s legislative session stipulating that if a local government chose to regulate vacation rentals, it should subject all properties to inspection and certification. “No one wants big government.”

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