

Hocking County Public Hearing Recap
10/15/2025

On 10/15/25, the Hocking County Zoning Commission and David Baird, a consultant with American Structurepoint, hosted the first public hearing to go over the county's proposed ordinances which are currently in draft status. According to the 10/9/25 commissioners meeting on FB, it was discussed to be held at the Hocking Hills Retreat Center to discuss non-STR regs from 5-7 and then STR related regs to begin at 7.

While there were no noticeable changes to the HHLOA website version titled "**Draft # 3 STR Regs 10-7-25**" resulting from the previous week's town hall, there were positive developments we can make you aware of in that time span.

- At both the October 7 town hall and the October 15 public hearing, the zoning commission and county commissioners made it clear that the regulations will **not be rushed**. They emphasized their openness to feedback and collaboration in developing solutions.
- At the town hall, OHLA/ULO Executive Director Joe Savarise proposed working collaboratively with the zoning commission, to which Audie Wykle agreed, expressing a desire to develop a "**win-win**" set of regulations.
- During the public hearing, leaders announced there is no current deadline for a vote. Commissioner Linton later stated that he does not see any possibility of meeting the original target date of October 30, 2025.
- The commission reaffirmed their commitment to creating balanced, mutually beneficial regulations and agreed to meet with Joe Savarise and a small group of STR owners to work toward that goal. They also encouraged STR owners to prioritize their top concerns, acknowledging that the current draft is not perfect.

HHLOA will continue to monitor, collaborate, and communicate with members, industry experts, residents, zoning commission and other relevant entities to ensure these matters are addressed fairly, reasonably and sustainably for the benefit of both the STR industry and the broader community. We will report any new developments as they become available.

We are currently scheduling conversations/meetings with the zoning commission and OHLA. Updates regarding important notices, future drafts, additional public hearings, or other key information will be shared as they are confirmed.

Sincerely,
HHLOA Board

Below you will find the initial input and some initial win-win propositions that have been submitted to the zoning commission for review.



Input on Hocking County Short-Term Rental Ordinance – October 7, 2025 draft

Section 2 (D) – while “bedroom” may be defined for certain purposes, the ordinance should not prohibit accommodations for sleeping in areas not defined as bedrooms, as long as those areas meet or exceed the necessary health and safety standards.

2 (E) – [Question: is “driveway” defined in other sections of county code for other types of businesses and for non-commercial properties and residences? If so, is the definition consistent?]

2 (F) – defining “dwelling unit” as “being used for permanent human habitation” could be problematic in that by definition transient accommodations are not permanent. It may be better to simply include the desired standards, i.e. inclusion of a sink, toilet and shower/bath.

2 (G) – clarity is needed on the purpose and role of a local contact person and the expectations for availability and responsiveness. It should be clear this provision relates to availability to assist public officials or public agencies or to facilitate contact with those officials or agencies, and is not a customer service function.

2 (I) – this definition could use more clarity and specificity. Rooms not generally thought of as living rooms could qualify as written. [Question: what is “informal” use of a room?]

Section 3 (B)(8) – the process regarding background checks should be clarified. Checks for “primary applicant” are required but only “owner,” “authorized agent” and “local contact person” are alluded to in definitions. The section states a person “may” be precluded from operating a STR business, but does not specify what variables and standards factor into that decision.

3 (B)(10) – this section references acknowledgment of fines for noncompliance, but the ordinance contains no schedule of fines or penalties.

3 (C) – fees for STR permits should be uniform. If there is an additional fee or expense for variances, those could be defined and enumerated separately as specific costs, i.e. variance fee.

3 (D)(1) – inspections should be completed within a specified timeframe from submission of application, to avoid situations where businesses are prohibited from opening without due process simply by not performing an inspection.

Section 4 (A)(1) – similar to 2 (G) above, the purpose and function of this role should be clearly defined to create the desired outcome and availability, i.e. official response vs. customer service requests.

4 (B) – numerous references are made to “tenant” which is undefined and a legally incorrect term. Transient guests are not tenants, and use of that term could unintentionally signal or confer rights that they do not have.

4 (B)(5) – prohibiting “tenants” from an otherwise legal activity and allowing that activity for another class of individual in the very same section inevitably invites eventual legal challenges and issues for STR businesses. If there is a safety issue regarding this activity in the county, it should be addressed in the relevant section of general codes. [Comment: this section contains a lengthy note on “reasoning” to justify its inclusion, but what about the situation where a guest at the STR is exposed to the same danger from neighbor “homeowners ... target shooting on their own property” which the language specifically allows?]

4 (C) – numerous requirements seem redundant, unnecessary, and/or possibly in conflict with existing relevant building codes. The desired outcome could be accomplished simply by requiring compliance with the existing and relevant codes. This would also negate the need for changes as those building codes are altered. Building codes also regularly grandfather structures since those buildings complied at the time of their completion.

4 (C)(2) – restricting sleeping areas only to areas narrowly defined as bedroom or lofts risks limiting the operation of many lodging businesses. Sleeping areas which meet existing health and safety requirements may not necessarily conform to those definitions as proposed.

4 (D)(4) – requiring parking on site does not recognize situations where an STR property owner may create an arrangement with another property owner to provide sufficient parking that is not necessarily on site. [Comment: for example, a property owner may pay for spaces in an adjacent or nearby lot for use by guests.]

4 (E) – while emergency services access is of paramount importance to those owning, operating and patronizing STR businesses, it is correct to simply require

compliance with existing, consistent standards.

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4 (G) – specific landscaping requirements do not address health, safety and welfare per se, and should not be specific to STR regulation. [Question: why is it fair and equitable to require landscaping of an STR property owner, when an STR property could easily be located next to an adjoining property that is not properly or adequately maintained and poses a disadvantage to the operation of the STR business, or the owner-occupied STR property owner’s quality of life?]

4 (H)(2) – the specified size is excessive for the purpose. Existing standards can be applied.

4 (K) – the legal age to enter a contract is 18. Consideration should be given here to the purpose and effect of this provision. Individuals are able to serve their country as a member of the armed forces prior to age 21, have the right to vote, and in many instances are employed and pay taxes.

4 (L) – it appears the intent of this provision is for a minimum rental period to not be an hourly rental. The language requires a minimum rental period of one day. However, it is standard practice in the lodging industry that rentals are made “per night.” Nightly stays often do not cover a full 24-hour period due to the time required to turn over (prepare) rooms for the next incoming guests the same day as the first guest departs. It would be clearer and avoid problems for operators to state the minimum rental period as “one night” rather than one day.

4 (N) – this section may be an opportune place to introduce the standard of grandfathering existing permitted STR businesses from new and additional requirements. This practice is a basic principle of many building code standards.

Section 7 (B) – while access for inspection is with precedent and permissible, it would be better to state this as “at any reasonable time” to introduce and affirm the idea that the intent of inspection is not to be intrusive, disruptive or unworkable. Reference is included in state statutes regarding State Fire Marshal inspections as occurring “at any reasonable time.”

Contact: Joe Savarise, President & CEO

OHLA—Unique Lodging of Ohio • 175 S Third Street, Ste 170 • Columbus, OH 43215 • 614-461-6462 • joe@ohla.org



Suggested “Win-Win” Provisions for STR Ordinance

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In Section 1: Purpose. Include as part of the “purpose” of the ordinance language that affirms the desire to support short-term rental businesses, their owners, and the economic activity they produce and which benefits the entire county. Currently, the purpose only alludes to health, safety, and welfare and the related compliance aspects.

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At least once per every six months, a body composed of a representative each of the Board of Commissioners, County Regional Planning Office, County Auditor, Office of Bed Tax Administrator, STR Variance Board, and county convention and visitors bureau, along with a minimum of two development organization representatives appointed by commissioners, and three industry representatives appointed by a 501(c)(6) association representing lodging property owners and operators, shall be convened to review the state of the short term rental market and the impacts and level of effectiveness of any regulation, and produce a report with findings including any recommended changes to regulations, policies or procedures related to operation of short-term rental businesses. The committee shall include in its purview examination of economic development efforts and potential programs which produce or could potentially produce specific results to help foster continued growth of and support for STRs which will increase jobs, tax revenue and economic activity within the county.

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On an annual basis, in collaboration with the County Auditor, Office of Bed Tax Administrator, county convention and visitors bureau, and other interested parties, the Board of Commissioners shall complete and issue an Economic Impact Report detailing the fiscal, workforce, and other related impacts that are specifically attributable to the functioning of transient accommodation businesses within the county. Such report shall include tax revenue as well as business activity including direct sales and induced activity, and shall be provided to each permitted lodging rental business and made available to the public.

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There shall be established a single point of contact within the County Regional Planning Office, specifically designated to assist STR businesses in connecting with any relevant County agency or official related to inquiries about the STR business, to provide consistent initial information regarding regulations and other requirements, to communicate developments regarding any governmental impacts on STR businesses or changes in requirements or procedures to owners and operators, and to advocate for any STR business owner or operator experiencing difficulty in receiving necessary information or assistance from government agencies or officials.

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Two-tenths of one percent of countywide lodging tax resulting from short-term rentals shall be earmarked for a fund for the marketing and support of a robust short-term rental market within the county. Use of the funds shall be determined solely by a committee appointed by a 501(c)(6) corporation representing owners and operators of STR businesses within the county other than a convention and visitors bureau already receiving lodging tax proceeds under different provisions and shall include one representative of the county convention and visitors bureau.

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A committee shall be established by the Board of Commissioners to examine issues related to workforce and jobs in the transient accommodations industry, with the goal of maximizing opportunities for county residents to benefit from employment and career opportunities. Such committee shall engage in discussions with workforce partnerships, institutions of high learning, public schools, state job agencies, foundations, and any other entity which has the potential of providing resources which may help grow the county's workforce for this critical sector and provide residents more opportunities for skills training, prosperity and entrepreneurship.

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Reports of harassment, threats or intimidation directed at patrons and guests of short-term rental businesses shall be investigated by law enforcement authorities to determine the potential applicability of codes and statutes regarding assault, criminal menacing or other relevant offenses. This section to be included in the Guest Conduct and Information Notice.

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