

LET'S TALK ABOUT SHORT TERM RENTALS

A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF A PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
PROCESS WITH THE COMMUNITY OF WEAVERVILLE FOCUSED
ON EXPERIENCES WITH LOCAL SHORT-TERM RENTALS

WEAVERVILLE,
NORTH CAROLINA

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PREPARED BY: LAND OF SKY REGIONAL COUNCIL



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nationwide, local governments are exploring and investigating the impact of short-term rentals on their communities. In 2023, Weaverville Town Council determined that it would like to evaluate the impact of short-term rentals within its corporate limits and tasked the Planning Board with beginning the evaluation process.

Town Council requested that the Planning Board investigate short-term rentals as research shows these can, to varying degrees, impact housing affordability, housing stock, and community character. Other communities, including Buncombe County and the City of Asheville, are investigating the current and potential impacts of short-term rentals in their communities.

To address this request by the Town's Council, the Town Manager recommended partnering with the Land of Sky Regional Council (LOSRC) to facilitate a public engagement process surrounding this topic in Weaverville. LOSRC developed a process to gather community input and identify any existing or future

concerns surrounding short-term rentals. LOSRC's process utilized three engagement sessions with the community to gather necessary information. Following these sessions, LOSRC performed a qualitative analysis coupled with United States Census Data to reveal current and future trends surrounding short-term rentals in the Town.

One of the goals for the short-term rental public engagement process is to identify any community concerns and issues that currently exist or may exist with the knowledge that planning is best when it is done proactively.

ABOUT LAND OF SKY REGIONAL COUNCIL | LOSRC is a regional planning and development organization located in Western North Carolina and serves Buncombe, Madison, Henderson, and Transylvania counties and their municipalities. LOSRC's primary mission is to address regional challenges, promote sustainable development, and enhance the overall quality of life for the region's residents.

PROCESS

LOSRC developed a process focused on direct and personal community engagement to obtain input and identify any existing or future concerns surrounding short-term rentals in Weaverville. LOSRC planned three engagement sessions between December of 2023 and January of 2024.

LOSRC held the first engagement session on December 5, 2023, following the regular December Planning Board meeting in Weaverville's Town Hall. LOSRC structured this session as a listening session for the general public to share their questions, concerns, and experiences surrounding short-term rentals. Approximately 80 individuals attended this session.

LOSRC held the second engagement session on January 9, 2024, in Weaverville's Town Hall. This session was marketed to those living in neighborhoods or areas with existing short-term rentals to obtain specific experiences, positive or negative, of the impacts of short-term rental on this group. Other groups were welcome to attend this session as observers. Approximately 33 individuals attended this session.

LOSRC held the final engagement session via Zoom on January 17, 2024. LOSRC marketed this session to short-term rental owners and operators to obtain the specific experiences, positive or negative, of short-term rental owners and operators in Weaverville. LOSRC also asked participants to respond to information gathered from the previous engagement session. Other groups were welcome to attend as observers. 32 individuals attended this session, 17 of whom registered as short-term rental owners or operators.

PROCESS SUMMARY TABLE

DATE	# OF ATTENDEES	FOCUS
12/05/23	80 (approx.)	General public
01/09/24	33 (approx.)	Residents living in neighborhoods with short-term rentals
01/17/24	32	Short-term rental owners and operators

Following these engagement sessions, LOSRC prepared a report summarizing their facilitation observations.

ENGAGEMENT

SESSION A

SESSION SUMMARY | This session provided a listening forum for the general public to share their questions, concerns, comments, and experiences on short-term rentals in Weaverville. Attendees were asked about challenges in affordability and availability of securing housing in Weaverville. Those who responded shared that finding housing that is available and affordable, especially in walkable areas, was challenging. One attendee shared their concerns over the impact of limited liability corporations purchasing property in Town on housing affordability and availability. Attendees were also asked about the impacts on community and neighborhood character from short-term rentals. Those who responded shared that they were concerned about new short-term rentals impacting the feeling of “neighborliness” in their communities. One attendee shared a specific situation where a short-term rental repeatedly left trash out outside of trash days. Attendees also shared the positive experiences they had with short-term rental owners in their neighborhoods. This session also facilitated discussion about the positive impacts of short-term rentals on the local economy and the success of Weaverville’s downtown.

Session A, the first engagement session, was dedicated to discussing two main topics with the general public: housing and community character. The facilitator organized the session in a listening format and requested that participants respond in 30-second intervals. The facilitator kept responses to participants brief to ensure all comments were received with the time allotted. As a note, the terms short-term rental “owner” and short-term rental “operator” are used interchangeably throughout this report as there were no participants that identified themselves solely as operators or owners.

Participants were first asked about their experiences on how short-term rentals impacted housing affordability and availability in Weaverville. Long-term residents of Weaverville shared that the “bottom price” of housing in Weaverville had risen since they first purchased their homes. These participants stated that they believed there was a supply and demand issue in Weaverville. A 22-year resident shared that finding housing in Weaverville has always been challenging. One participant cited shortages from the 2008 financial crisis and relocations from the COVID-19 pandemic as contributing factors to the lack of available housing in Weaverville. Additional impacts cited later in this session included supply chain issues, cost of building, and shortage of buildable land.

For those looking to move to Weaverville, participants shared that they “hear people saying all the time I can’t find a place to rent, I can’t find a place to buy.” A new resident of Weaverville shared their experience in purchasing their new home. This participant’s experience was challenging as they wanted to purchase a home in a walkable area. Price aside, there were very few listings that met the requirement of walkability, especially in the downtown area. As part of their home search, the participant stayed in three short-term rentals and was told by other residents

that they “had to come and hang out to try and network because you weren’t going to find a house (otherwise).” This participant ultimately bought one of the short-term rentals they stayed in but acknowledged that they had gotten “very lucky.” This participant also acknowledged that their experience was unique as they wanted something fully furnished and were willing to pay the premium for the walkability. In addition to their experience purchasing a home in Weaverville, this participant also shared that the short-term rental they purchased had gone through two owners in four years, neither of whom had ever been to the property. As a note, this participant did not look in areas that were not walkable when looking to purchase in Weaverville, so they were unsure if their experience was applicable elsewhere in Town.

Long-term and newer residents both voiced concerns over the conversion of long-term rentals to short-term rentals, in addition to existing residences being purchased by short-term rental operators. One participant shared that a house down the street from their residence was purchased by a new owner and converted from a long-term rental to a short-term rental. Following this conversion, the new owner evicted the four long-term tenants. The participant is not sure where the residents ended up, but they believed at least one of them no longer lived in Weaverville.

Participants also raised the question as to whether Limited Liability Corporations (LLCs) or “corporate Air BnB” purchasers had contributed to the rise in the price of housing in Weaverville. Participants explained that these entities may have the ability to buy properties at a higher market rate to turn them into businesses. Participants did not provide specific examples of this occurring. Participants also noted that marketing of properties as short-term rentals may result in these properties selling at higher prices, which may also contribute to increased

housing prices in Weaverville. One participant observed this marketing with the short-term rentals on Church Street and North College Street. The realtor marketed this property as an “Air BnB.”

On the other hand, participants shared concerns over the “fear-based” nature of the comments other participants shared about LLCs. One participant stated that “there’s no big corporation coming in, moving in to buy it [the property], snapping it up. I think a lot of these things are fear-based and not factual. And I think if Weaverville is going to make some logical decisions and fair decisions that it should be based on facts.” Other participants echoed this sentiment. Participants also noted that there is “really no affordable housing” in Weaverville or elsewhere nearby. Home prices are getting more expensive and new residences are selling at higher prices. One participant shared that housing construction is also more expensive these days and that the value owners get from selling their properties at a higher value should not be “taken away.” Additional questions raised included whether the regulation of short-term rentals meant that businesses supported by short-term rentals, like wedding venues, were going to be regulated, too.

During this session, a self-identified employee of the Land of the Sky Association of Realtors (LOTSAR) shared that LOTSAR commissioned a study a few years ago to examine the impact of short-term rentals in Buncombe County on housing supply and price. The results of that study, using a correlation matrix done by economists, was that short-term rentals were at the bottom of the list of factors correlating to cost inflation. They also shared that Oxford Economics did a similar study in June on the impact of short-term rentals on affordable housing and found a similar result. One participant responded to this information by stating that they believed “it was risky to take a study that looked at a metropolitan area, such as Asheville, and compare it to a neighborhood with only 2,000 single-family residences.” Whether the LOTSAR and Oxford Economics studies are directly comparable to Weaverville is unclear. However, these studies point to trends empirically observed in other small towns throughout Buncombe County and the region. Several participants noted that those representing the real estate industry may have different incentives in their responses than residences.

Following this discussion, participants were asked to share their experiences with the impacts of short-term rentals on neighborhood and community character. Participants shared both positive and negative experiences with the facilitator. Participants sharing positive experiences

identified both as current short-term rental owners who live in Weaverville and those who do not operate short-term rentals in Weaverville. Participants in both groups identified knowing their neighbors as an important community characteristic.

While both groups acknowledged the importance of this knowing their neighbors, participants who were not short-term rental owners voiced concern over the impact of short-term rentals on this characteristic. One participant shared their experience by stating they know their neighbors and “if someone’s sick, I check on them or I might walk their dog if they need help.” This participant went on to say that they would feel “very badly” if the neighbors around them disappeared and that they “don’t want tourists surrounding me. I want neighbors surrounding me.” Another participant shared that there are a few houses on their street that have become “dark houses” which was “killing the community.” However, this participant was not sure whether these houses were short-term rentals. Another participant shared that in their experience, the short-term rental in their neighborhood had “no concern about the neighbors or the residents.” When asked to clarify what that statement meant, the participant responded by sharing that there is a lot of “stuff” in the backyard and garbage is still left out after trash day. It is important to note that the Town of Weaverville’s Planning Director corresponded with the Town’s Police and Public Works Departments, as well as the Weaverville Business Association, regarding short-term rentals and these entities reported no identifiable issues.

On the other hand, one participant shared that in their neighborhood on Alexander Road, there was a short-term rental and a long-term rental on either side of their home. There was a “street brawl in the front yard over some illicit transaction” and the police intervened throughout the night. The party involved in the brawl was the long-term rental. This participant shared that they had never had a problem like that with the short-term rental. In this participant’s experience, short-term rentals were not part of the issue. Another participant shared that, in their experience, the short-term rentals in their neighborhoods were well cared for and they never had any issues with the guests. On the other hand, the long-term rentals looked run down and had “lots of activity there.” In response to an earlier participant speaking about a short-term rental on Church Street, this participant shared that there were also long-term rentals on the same street that “don’t really look good.”

Self-identified short-term rental owners who responded to this question stated that they had operated in the community for between three and five years. Most of these short-term rental owners were long-term residents or those who grew up in Weaverville, left, and now returned to the Town. These short-term rental owners shared that they believed they have brought their communities together and had positively impacted their neighbors. As short-term rental operators, they took care of their properties, worked to get to know their neighbors, maintained those relationships, and ensured that the neighbors knew who to contact if there were any problems. These participants shared that they were at their rentals frequently, and neighbors often stopped to chat and catch up with them. One participant shared that the short-term rental they purchased was previously a dilapidated and vacant structure. This participant renovated and improved the property, much to the delight of their neighbors. Short-term rental owners shared that they were dependent on guests writing good reviews. One participant later in the session stated that reviews from guests and the incentive to get high reviews were the “check and balance that keeps it from being trashy or a bad thing for our community.” As business owners, these individuals shared that they did everything they could to make their guests’ stay pleasant.

Short-term rental owners shared the positive economic impact that their properties have had on Weaverville. Several stated that those who stayed in their short-term rentals initially visited because they wanted to visit Asheville. These visitors ended up spending their entire visit in Weaverville because of how much character the Town had and often returned to Weaverville for that reason. Other short-term rental owners echoed this sentiment. One stated that short-term rentals allowed visitors to come and live “a local experience.”

Several short-term rental owners stated that the businesses in Weaverville were directly supported by those coming to visit Weaverville and that this point could be understated. One shared that their guests were “eating meals out, they’re shopping, they’re turning stuff in, they’re taking them home.” Many shared that supporting local businesses with short-term rentals was a positive element of the community. It is important to note that a portion of Weaverville’s economy, much like the rest of the region, is driven by tourism. One short-term rental owner shared that they believed that if short-term rentals ceased to exist in Weaverville large hotel groups would take their place. They went on to state that in addition to hotel groups not providing the same localized experience that short-term rentals provide, hotel stock did not contribute

to housing stock at the end of the businesses life. This short-term rental owner stated that one of the short-term rentals that they constructed would not exist if not for the short-term rental business. They built this dwelling to be a short-term rental. It was not converted from the existing housing stock.

During this session, one short-term rental owner shared an interesting perspective stating that, in their experience, it was limited to think of neighbors only as someone present a certain number of days or nights per month, week, or year because permanent neighbors could be terrible too. This participant went on to say that they believed the Town needed to “expand our belief of what creates community.” As a short-term rental owner, this participant thought of themselves as an ambassador to people worldwide. The position of an “ambassador” was shared by other short-term rental owners during this session. These short-term rental owners and others have repeat guests who have returned to their rentals and have developed their own friendships in the community.

The remaining time in this session was left as space for other comments that fell outside of the two discussion buckets of housing and community character. Several participants, both short-term rental owners and not, reiterated the positive impact of short-term rentals on the local economy. One of the main industries in this region is tourism. Participants highlighted that short-term rentals were a viable business option that supported that industry. Local businesses may not be able to continue growing and developing if they did not have customers from tourism, including those staying in local short-term rentals. One participant observed that the trash from their short-term rental was all from businesses on Main Street, including Blue Mountain Pizza and Leveller Brewing. Further, short-term rentals could be small-scale employers themselves. Two short-term rental owners stated that they employed local Weaverville residents to service and maintain their rentals.

Short-term rentals were also identified as the sole source of income for some and supported local entrepreneurship, which was a priority observed by one participant who attended several Town Council meetings. One participant stated that they were able to move back to Weaverville after leaving and invest in the community because of the ability to operate a short-term rental. Another participant stated that short-term rentals have contributed to “the vibrancy and the character of the Town of Weaverville because in order to have vibrancy and character, you have to have a mix of people and that contribute to the aliveness

of it and to the businesses.”

In contrast to these sentiments, one participant questioned whether those who operated short-term rentals could be just as effective in operating long-term rentals instead. This participant went on to state that “there are other ways to use properties to generate income.” In this participant’s observation, the number of short-term rentals had doubled in the last three or four years. However, this information could not be verified. This participant shared concern over having “more short-term rentals in Town than we know what to do with and perhaps we need to draw a line as to how many we can actually accommodate in Weaverville.”

The facilitator noted that two participants applauded both the attendees in the session and the Town for participating in these conversations. One participant emphasized “the understanding of balance” and that while investments in real estate were where society was, the Town needed to consider what was best for the next generation. Another participant stated that “it’s important that we’re educated and that we are looking forward and being proactive.”

ENGAGEMENT

SESSION B

SESSION SUMMARY | This session facilitated a focused conversation for residents living in neighborhoods with short-term rentals where they shared their individual experiences. Residents from Ridgewood Avenue, Highland Street, Church Street, Flat Creek, College Street, Rabbit Ridge Drive, Water Point Way, Salem Road, Pleasant Grove Road, and the Hunters Ridge and Ridgewood Subdivisions provided comment. Short-term rental owners and operators who personally lived in the neighborhoods their rentals were located in also attended. Attendees were asked what they valued in their neighborhoods. Elements shared included a sense of community and walkability. Attendees then shared experiences that were both positive (short-term rental owners getting to know their neighbors) and negative (not knowing who to call if there was an issue) with short-term rental owners in their neighborhoods. The attendees also discussed the former bed and breakfast industry in Weaverville as a mark of both market changes and a cultural shift in the Town. New and long-term residents who lived in neighborhoods with short-term rentals shared their experiences on obtaining and affording housing. Both groups shared challenges with availability, while affordability was primarily an issue with newer residents.

The facilitator structured the second engagement session as a focus group to engage directly with participants who lived in neighborhoods with existing short-term rentals. Other groups were welcome to attend this session as observers. The facilitator's questions during this session were informed by the results of Session A. This session began with an icebreaker question where attendees were asked what "short-term" rental meant to them. Participants responded with "a few days", "a week", and "2-month period" with a "few days" being the most agreed upon response.

Following the icebreaker, participants were asked to describe their neighborhood, share what things they liked and valued, and identify what neighborhood or street they lived on or were there to represent. Short-term rental owners were welcome to participate if they lived in the same neighborhood as their short-term rental and were also asked to identify themselves.

Residents from Ridgewood Avenue, Highland Street, Church Street, and Flat Creek shared that, in their neighborhoods, they valued the sense of community, walkability, privacy, and close relationships with neighbors. The residents from Church Street shared that "it's a special street, and we have a lot of diversity, and we all get along" and that the neighborhood "really looks after each other." The Flat Creek resident shared that they valued their neighbors because "they're awesome." This resident shared that the neighborhood had a shared pet lamb that the community cared for together. One resident on Church and College Street shared their experience of being stuck at an out-of-state airport. The pet sitter they had hired had already left, but the neighbors came over and took care of their pets. The participant shared that "when this happens and you're

already trying to figure out how you're going to get out of LaGuardia it's nice that somebody can get to the house to take care of the dogs."

Participants were then asked to share whether the important characteristics of their neighborhoods had changed over time. A resident on Rabbit Ridge Drive shared that when the participant moved to the neighborhood ten or 12 years ago "everything was very close. Everybody was like that, knew everybody in and out of everybody's houses." There were now three rentals (at least two of which were short-term rentals) in the neighborhood, which had changed the complexion of the street. When asked to elaborate on how this complexion changed, the resident responded that "we don't necessarily know who's there." This resident also shared that the short-term rental "had rowdy people that knocked over people's mailboxes and then they denied it." Residents living on Water Point Way, Highland Street, Salem Road, and in the Hunters Ridge and Ridgewood Subdivisions echoed this resident's experience. Representatives of those areas agreed that they did not know who owned or managed the short-term rentals in their neighborhoods or who to call if there was a problem. In their experience, there was a lack of accountability. If the owners were not around, they were not accountable.

The resident on Salem Road, who also identified as an owner of a room-for-rent short-term rental out of their residence, believed there was a difference between those short-term rentals managed by private residents versus those overseen by management companies. In this resident's experience, the short-term rentals overseen by management companies were not well cared for and "they don't even feel like a home. They feel like a business."

The Hunters Ridge resident specifically shared that they were concerned over safety regarding the short-term rentals in their neighborhood. This resident stated that “it’s the idea that you have a bunch of people coming in from out of Town that you don’t know. We have a lot of little kids around and in this crazy world, I don’t know what could potentially happen, but I’m not comfortable with having a bunch of people, particularly from other states coming into our neighborhood, I’m just not happy with that at all.” Other residents of Hunters Ridge were present at this meeting. Most agreed with this experience. The residents of Hunters Ridge also shared that they convinced one of the short-term rentals in their neighborhood to stop operating as it was not conducive to the neighborhood. Several participants also attended to comment on the duplexes at Central and College Street and shared their experience of the duplexes consistently leaving their trash out and not knowing who managed or owned the property as no one had ever introduced themselves.

In contrast, a resident who lived off of Pleasant Grove Road and had two short-term rentals directly around their home stated the short-term rentals had not really changed anything about their neighborhood. In this resident’s experience, the short-term rentals had been well maintained and it had been a good experience. Later in the session, the facilitator asked this resident if they knew the short-term rental operator or owner, to which the resident responded that they did. The owner lived in Florida, but he was at the short-term rental several times a year. The resident had exchanged phone numbers with the owner and shared that they had been to parties at the short-term rental hosted by the owner. The resident stated that they had never had any issues with the short-term rental. This resident went on to say that the two short-term rentals had provided a job for another neighbor, who was previously unemployed. Before becoming short-term rentals, the properties were owned by families. However, in this resident’s experience “those neighbors, you know, we probably didn’t see them anymore than we see the owners of those homes now.”

Another resident, who did not identify where they lived, seconded the Pleasant Grove Road resident’s experience. This resident quickly met those who purchased the short-term rentals near them and now “they are like neighbors” and they had become friends with some of the guests. In contrast to those who spoke earlier, one of the Hunters Ridge residents stated that the short-term rentals that fit into their community were rooms-for-rent. When asked to elaborate on what enabled those properties to fit into their neighborhood, this resident stated that it was because

the owners stayed on-site and remained a part of the neighborhood. Other residents of West Street and those living on the other side of the highway shared that they had not experienced any negative impacts from short-term rentals, but both acknowledged that this may have been a result of their location and physical proximity to neighbors.

Independent of the facilitator, the participants began discussing bed and breakfasts. Attendees shared that there was once a thriving bed and breakfast-business environment in Weaverville. Now, there were no bed and breakfasts in operation. With the closure of bed and breakfasts, some residents lost their jobs. One participant shared that they owned a bed and breakfast for 22 years that was no longer in business. Another wondered if the real estate market had driven out bed and breakfasts in favor of short-term rentals. When participants were asked to elaborate on the difference between a short-term rental and a bed and breakfast, one participant stated “personal contact.” Those staying in bed and breakfasts meant somebody was there and a part of the community. Bed and breakfasts provided “a whole lot of stuff.”

Following this participant, another chimed in that short-term rentals had caused a decrease in bed and breakfasts across the country and Europe. In this participant’s experience “people are used to something less than what their bed and breakfast is offering”, but that people need to want that experience to pay for it. Another participant, who shared that their family had been in Weaverville since 1785, believed there was a cultural change happening in Weaverville. Younger people “aren’t interested in the community. They aren’t interested in interacting with other people or meeting other people at a bed and breakfast or talking with other people.”

Next, participants were asked to identify whether they had moved to Weaverville in the last five years and whether they rented or owned their property. This group was then asked to share their experience of finding housing for rent or purchase in Weaverville.

Participants overall shared challenges in finding and affording housing in Weaverville. Responses were obtained from both older and younger age brackets. Older age brackets shared that even five years ago there were not a lot of properties available. There was and is less available stock at higher prices. One participant, who built a home on Moore Street three years ago, questioned how anyone not already owning a home could purchase one.

The same participant went on to share that the inability of people to purchase homes, have children, and walk through their communities was unsustainable. These sentiments were shared by others later in the session. Earlier, one participant shared their observations on the duplexes at the corner of Central and College Street. The duplexes were previously rented by long-term tenants, one as long as 25 years. When a short-term rental operator purchased the duplexes, the tenants were evicted. The long-term tenants then could not find affordable or available housing in Weaverville and at least one had since left the area.

Younger respondents shared similar challenges to their older counterparts. One long-term renter responded to this question with their experience. This resident shared that their husband grew up in Weaverville and that they relocated to the area in 2020. They planned to rent for a year while they oriented themselves with the area. The resident shared that they “fell in love. I honestly couldn’t even comment about what was happening in the rest of Asheville because I don’t go past the Woodfin wall.” Four years later, the participant is still in the same rental house and shared “I’m lucky in fact that my landlord is still renting the same house to me at the same price. If I was her, I would kick us out and sell it because she can double her money.” This resident shared that they could make a 20% down payment and that their income was in the top 10% of North Carolina, but “we can’t afford to live in Weaverville. We quit looking and now we’re looking at housing markets in Charlotte and Raleigh, which are ironically cheaper.” Two other residents shared this same experience. One stated that “the only reason we afforded our house in Weaverville in our neighborhood was because I was a travel nurse at the time.” Even then, the house they purchased still required a lot of money to be put into it. This resident doubted that anyone else their age could have afforded a house. Another shared that they moved to the area in 2021 and originally planned on renting but could not find a long-term rental. The resident then decided to try to purchase property in Weaverville but was outbid by cash offers twice.

One participant shared their observations as a long-term renter unable to purchase property. In this resident’s experience, there was currently a shift in demographics in Weaverville that Town Council needed to consider. Weaverville was mostly families over the last 40 years, but that had now shifted to mostly retirees. Based on demographics shared by this participant, the median age in Weaverville was almost double that of Asheville, 54 years old compared to 27 years old. During the writing of this report, LOSRC checked these figures and, per the

2022 ACS 5-Year Surveys for Weaverville and Asheville, the median age in Weaverville and Asheville were listed at 53.5 and 40.5 years old, respectively. This resident went on to state that “housing costs across the country went up 45%, but in Weaverville they went up 77%.”

It was not clear which housing demographic value this participant was sharing, and it is difficult to compare housing prices in Weaverville to the nation, as Weaverville is only sampled during the decennial and 5-year censuses while the United States is sampled every year. As a note, the United States Census Bureau does not recommend using overlapping 5-year periods for comparison. Using non-overlapping periods, the 2022 ACS 5-Year Survey showed that the median home value in 2022 in Weaverville was \$423,000 (from the 2022 ACS 5-Year Survey) compared to \$257,700 in 2017 (from the 2017 ACS 5-Year Survey). Compared to the United States, the median home value in 2022 was \$320,900 (from the 2022 ACS 1-Year Survey) and \$217,600 in 2017 (from the 2017 ACS 1-Year Survey). These figures show an increase in median home value from 2017 to 2022 of 64% for Weaverville compared to 47% for the nation. This resident then shared that, based on their calculations, there were 1,772 single-family homes and 74 Air BnBs in the town limits of Weaverville. These Air BnBs represent 4.2% of the housing stock being used as a commercial business and not as a residence. LOSRC’s figures show 2,125 housing units and 85 active short-term rentals as of November 6, 2023. The resident stated that there are “like two houses being built a year”, which does not increase supply sufficiently. This information could not be verified. However, as demand increases and supply decreases, prices go up.

The participants in this session agreed that those coming into Weaverville today have more purchasing power than younger age brackets or those currently living in the area. One participant added “that’s stemming from people moving from wealthier markets, or maybe empty nesters who had built a lot of equity in other markets. And in relatively compared to those places, this place is less expensive.” Another shared that “when I was just looking around Airbnb, a lot of the homes that I looked at, they’re not the million-dollar homes on the golf course. They are the small, simple houses in these populated neighborhoods, the kind of house that would be used for a single family as a starter home or like a grandparent on a fixed income. That’s just the short-term business model. You buy cheap homes, you make a profit, you dump on million-dollar mountain view vistas.” The participant went on to state that this short-term rental model was negatively impacting the “poorer population” as \$300,000

and below homes were being removed from the market disproportionality. This participant also shared that they investigated who owned these short-term rentals. Based on their observations, most of these short-term rentals were not owned by out-of-state entities, but instead by local individuals. However, the demographic of those owners was typically 60 years or older and wealthy. This participant did not share how they obtained this information. They went on to share that “when people want to live here, but then can’t afford it, because the price is too high, there’s such limited availability of housing, they will go to other bigger markets like Charlotte or Raleigh, where there’s more job opportunities. So in the long-term, you know, small towns like Weaverville and other towns in the area will really lose out on, you know, future economic benefits if this condition persists and people go other places.” This participant closed by stating “it seems like there is an improvement on the wealthy retirees that are coming in. And there is less of a market for the young family starter homes.”

As a note, a different participant shared that they wondered if a market correction with short-term rentals was occurring as the short-term rental across the street from them was empty most of the time and the owner had put the property up for sale. Since being listed, the property had been reduced twice in price.

The last part of this session asked participants who were long-term residents of Weaverville for more than five years to share how their experience finding long-term rentals or purchasing houses compared to those shared previously by newer residents. One participant stated that when they moved to Weaverville ten years ago, housing stock was much more abundant. Others shared the same experience, including one participant who purchased their home over five years ago at a lower price than it was listed for. These experiences stood in stark contrast to those of the previous group.

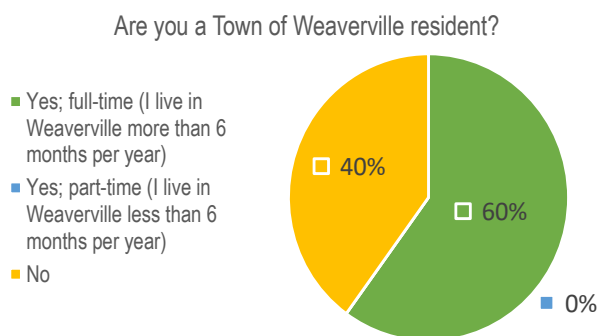
ENGAGEMENT

SESSION C

SESSION SUMMARY | This session focused on short-term rental owners and operators. This group was asked a series of polls throughout the session to obtain quantitative information on the current state of short-term rentals (based on those who attended and provided information). Attendees were asked to share the aspects of the locations of their short-term rentals that they valued. Elements included reflected those of Session B, including a sense of community and walkability. Attendees were then asked to identify the elements that influenced their purchase in Weaverville. Elements shared included tourism, ties to family, and being long-time visitors or residents of the area. A summary of Session B's engagement was then reviewed with this group and the attendees were asked to comment on the sentiments shared. Most responded that they agreed with the sentiments shared by Session B and expanded on what they, as short-term rental operators and owners, do to positively influence their communities. At the end of the session, attendees were asked what the Town and community could do to also be positive influences on their communities. Attendees were also asked whether there were actions the Town and community could take to support short-term rental owners who were positive influences on their communities. Comments shared included sharing general business information and more communication.

The final session of the public engagement process was targeted at short-term rental owners and operators. Other groups were welcome to attend this session as observers. The facilitator structured this session as a focus group, similar to Session B. The facilitator's questions during this session were informed by the results of Sessions A and B.

The facilitator opened the session with a poll asking about residency. Participants were asked to share whether they lived in Weaverville and, if they did, whether they were full- or part-time residents. Ten participants responded. Of the participants that responded, about half identified as full-time residents and half identified as non-residents.

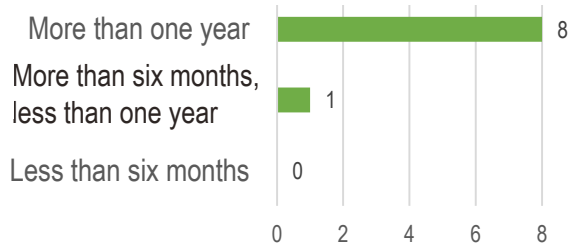


Following this poll, participants who lived in Weaverville were asked to share what aspects of their community or neighborhood they found important. The first participant, who was a long-term resident and short-term rental owner on Oakland Street, shared that they had great relationships with their neighbors. Having relationships with their neighbors was one of the things this resident valued in their neighborhood. They shared “there’s someone sick you know taking each other meals you know it’s being true neighbors and being friendly.” Other participants echoed

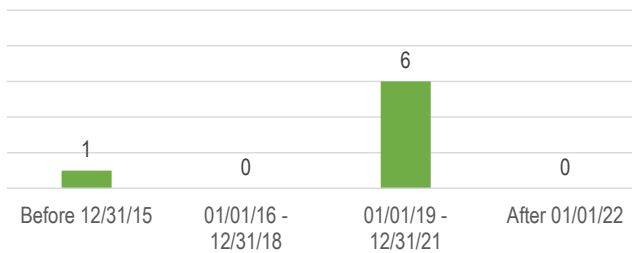
these sentiments. One, who was a full-time long-term resident and a short-term rental owner on Alabama and Church Street, shared that “we have quite the variety of ages around us and we all check on each other and um yeah that sort of thing they check on my kids I check on them the older single ladies um yeah all the families so those are the things that I enjoy about living in our neighborhood.” Not only were these relationships important to this participant, but the diversity in their neighborhood was also valuable. Another participant, a full-time newer resident and short-term rental owner on Church Street, shared that while they do not know their neighbors well, they do know everybody “a little bit” and that conveyed a sense of safety, community, and friendliness. Other participants also shared the importance of walkability, although this was neighborhood-dependent.

Following this discussion, participants were asked to complete two polls. This first poll asked how long participants had owned their short-term rental. Nine participants responded with most of the responses indicating that they had owned their short-term rentals for more than one year. No participants indicated that they had owned their short-term rental for less than six months. The second poll asked participants when they purchased their short-term rental. If participants owned multiple short-term rentals, they were asked to use the purchase date of their first short-term rental. Seven participants responded to this poll with all but one participant indicating that they purchased their short-term rental between January 1, 2019, and December 31, 2021. No participants indicated that they purchased a short-term rental between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2018, or after January 1, 2022.

How long have you owned/operated a short-term rental in Weaverville?



What year(s) did you purchase your short-term rental?
If you own more than one short-term rental in Weaverville, when did you purchase your first property?



After this poll, participants were asked to share what prompted them to purchase a short-term rental in Weaverville. Participants were also asked to identify what aspects of Weaverville were important factors in their purchase and whether those factors had changed over time. Those new to Weaverville or not residing in the Town as full-time residents shared that they either had family connections to the area or were long-term visitors who decided to put down more permanent roots. One participant shared that proximity to Asheville and hiking opportunities were important factors in their decision. Another shared that “we visited Weaverville over the last ten years and fell in love with the area”. One even purchased a “big, huge, historic Victorian” that they had restored as part of their love of Weaverville’s history. Their home, specifically, also allowed this participant to welcome guests to “come to Weaverville and experience the magic and also the historical nature.” Falling in love with Weaverville, its community, and its character was a sentiment that echoed through all three engagement sessions.

Participants also cited the importance of tourism as a major economic sector in Weaverville as part of their decision to purchase a short-term rental in the Town. Tourism is a part of Weaverville’s local economy and short-term rentals were a business that supported that industry. One participant shared that “whether we like it or not we live in this tourism vacation spot and we thought it’d be important to capitalize on that”. Another participant shared that their short-term rental had previously been a long-term rental, but the short-term rental was a more profitable option.

Short-term rental operation was also less wear and tear on the unit. While not living in the Weaverville Town limits another participant shared their negative experience with a long-term renter. In this participant’s experience “our tenants pretty much destroyed the property.” After repairing the damage, the participant converted the long-term rental to a short-term rental. While this testimony was provided by someone outside the Town’s limit, it was included in this report as this experience may be another factor to consider in why conversion of long-term rentals to short-term rentals is occurring.

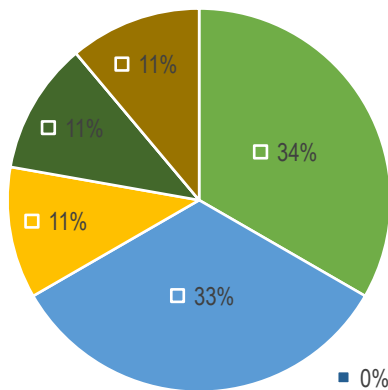
Another participant, who was born and raised in Weaverville, built their short-term rental in 2020. They shared that Town Council should be given credit because “in my lifetime this is the most vibrant main streets ever been and if you look at those businesses, I would say 90 of them live off of uh tourists they’re tourist-driven”. This participant reiterated previous sentiments about the importance of tourism as part of the local economy and noted that the contributions of short-term rentals to this segment of the economy could not be understated. In addition to short-term rentals as businesses, all the participants stated that their short-term rentals supported local businesses with their guests. They shared that people came to Weaverville to visit Asheville and ended up staying in Weaverville. This sentiment was also heard in other sessions. As a note, participants also shared that they used local resources, either as part of construction or as part of long-term maintenance, for their short-term rentals.

Participants were then asked to share any challenges they experienced when purchasing their short-term rental in terms of affordability and availability of housing. One participant later in the session said it best regarding affordability “the train left the left the station a long time ago as far as housing being affordable.” Several participants, in response to an earlier prompt, shared that short-term rentals enabled existing residents to be able to afford to stay in and new residents to move to Weaverville. Short-term rentals were a business for these participants. One participant shared that their short-term rental allowed them to support their children and “be able to have a future.”

Following this discussion, participants were asked to complete three polls. The first poll asked what the history of the participant’s short-term rental was by asking participants to identify what kind of short-term rental they operated and whether their short-term rental was existing or new construction. Nine participants responded to the first poll with most responding that their

short-term rental was a whole house rental that was either a former dwelling or rental unit or was new construction.

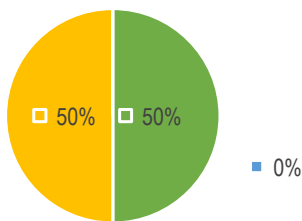
What is the history of your short-term rental?
If you own more than one short-term rental in Weaverville, select all that apply.



- My STR is a whole house rental and is formerly a permanent dwelling or rental unit.
- My STR is a whole house rental and is new construction.
- My STR is a whole house rental was previously an STR.
- My STR is a "room for rent" in my home.
- I'm not sure what the history of my STR is.
- Other

The second poll specifically asked participants with rooms-for-rent whether they stayed on-site when their guests were present. Four responses were received with half indicating that they stayed on site when a guest was present and half indicating that they did not.

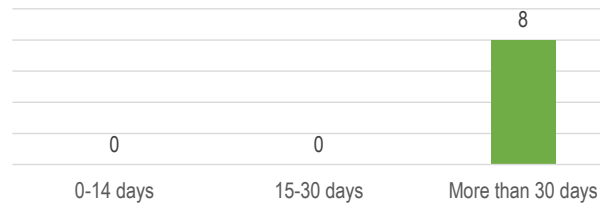
For those short-term rental owners or operators with private room rentals, do you stay on site when a renter is present?



- I always stay on site when a renter is present.
- I stay on site about half the time when a renter is present.
- I do not stay on site when a renter is present.
- Other

The final poll asked how many days per year their short-term rental was occupied. Those participants who owned more than one short-term rental were asked to provide an average. Eight responses were provided and all stated that their short-term rentals were occupied more than 30 days per year.

How many days per year is your short-term rental occupied? If you own or manage more than one short-term rental in Weaverville, what is the average?



After this poll, participants were asked to share whether they purchased their property in Weaverville specifically with the intent of having a short-term rental. Throughout this session, most participants shared that purchasing their personal home was contingent on operating a short-term rental. In many cases, the short-term rental was a business opportunity that allowed them to afford their home. One participant who constructed a new dwelling shared that they built it to be a short-term rental and planned to use the short-term rental as a retirement home in the future.

After this discussion, the facilitator shared the community impacts from those residents living in neighborhoods with short-term rentals gathered during Session B on January 9, 2024. The residents attending that meeting identified aspects of their communities that were important to them. These included:

- Knowing neighbors and sense of "neighborliness"
- The feeling of "eyes on the street" (i.e. someone is home, the lights are on)
- Diversity of neighborhoods
- Feelings of closeness
- Walkability (this is neighborhood-specific)
- Support of neighbors (feeding the dog when you have an emergency, looking after family members, etc.)

Next, residents shared, generally, how these aspects had changed since they first purchased their properties. These changes included not knowing who was living on the street or who to call if there was a problem and having fewer connections with neighbors. Residents identified feelings of homes becoming businesses and not knowing who to call if there was a problem as relating specifically to short-term rentals in their neighborhoods. A few residents also identified leaving trash out and not taking responsibility for property maintenance as another short-term rental-related issue. During this discussion, several residents shared the positive actions that short-term rental owners in their neighborhoods have taken to combat or even prevent these changes from occurring.

These included:

- Meeting the neighbors, forming relationships, sharing contact information
- Becoming or remaining members of their communities
- Taking care of their properties as a resident would (including trash pick up)

Participants were asked for their reactions to these sentiments and whether they were similar or different. Similar to the sentiments of Session B, participants spoke about meeting the neighbors, forming relationships, sharing contact information, becoming our remaining members of their communities, taking care of properties as a resident would, including trash pickup and maintaining outdoor amenities, as ways that they as short-term rental operators remain positive influences on their communities. Other actions shared throughout the session included supporting local businesses, keeping properties well maintained, having lower incident rates, and if you do have incidents addressing them. One participant responded that, as a resident (responding from a perspective separate from being a short-term rental owner), they had not experienced anything negative from any short-term rentals around them. This sentiment was shared by others in this session. This participant went on to state that “there have been some interesting neighbors and some long-term rentals”. Another participant shared “I think everybody’s assuming that if it’s a full-time renter, that they’re going to be a good neighbor.” Long-term rentals can be problematic too and those residents may also be around all the time. Another participant commented that on their street “the negative experiences that people have had would be long-term renters, people not, you know, not cutting their yard for six weeks, you know, leaving trash out.”

Participants also spoke about the aspect of property maintenance, particularly compared to long-term rentals. One shared that having a clean and well-maintained property was part of the business. Others seconded that short-term rental properties were, in their experience, quiet and well-maintained. Another participant shared that landlords may not be as invested in their properties since they did not rely on ratings as short-term rentals did. This participant also shared an experience they had with a bad short-term rental guest staying on their property. This guest drove over a neighbor’s yard and knocked over a light. However, this participant shared that they were “up there the next day and repaired his yard and replaced the light that she ran over.” Several participants shared

the demographics of their guests. While there were older guests, most were between 30 and 35. A lot of those visiting Weaverville, in these participants’ experience, were for weddings, birthdays, and anniversaries. In contrast to other markets, like Nashville, the demographics of those visiting Weaverville skewed older.

Participants reiterated the large extent that their short-term rental businesses supported and promoted local businesses. One participant stated “as probably most of the owners do, we have kind of a resource book in all of our rentals that promote the local businesses, let people know where to go. We’re constantly giving recommendations about that.” They went on to share that their guests often don’t even go into Asheville because of the small-town feel of Weaverville. Another participant shared that they have “artsy people” stay in their short-term rental who had given classes in Weaverville, which not only supported these businesses but also provided services for other local businesses. In the same vein, another participant shared that their guests attended “the wild abundance courses, the women-owned construction courses, and people who have been at workshops or trainings in Asheville”. The economic benefits of short-term rentals spread throughout the Town’s businesses and beyond.

The final discussion portion of this session asked participants to identify any actions the Town and community could take to support those short-term rental owners who were contributing positively to their neighborhoods. Throughout the session, participants reiterated that their short-term rental businesses supported and promoted local businesses. One participant stated that they tried to have menus from different restaurants and different things in Town, but they had a hard time putting those together. Since Weaverville did not have a Chamber of Commerce, it would be “great if local businesses, they don’t have to give a discount or anything, but make it easy for us to support you. Put together a booklet of places that you would like people to visit. That’s what I would like to see.” While mentioned earlier in the session, one participant shared that most short-term rentals were locally owned and operated. As the Town Council said “buy local”, this participant shared that this also included short-term rentals. This participant shared observations in other communities where factors outside of the community’s control, such as interstate systems shutting down, resulted in small towns disappearing or deteriorating over the years. Short-term rentals had brought people to Weaverville’s businesses and support Main Street. Later in the session, a different participant stated that Town Council could take a different path than

other local towns by embracing tourism and short-term rentals. This would communicate to others interested in this type of business that “hey, we could come into Weaverville and be welcomed in Weaverville”.

At the end of the session, participants were asked what the Town and larger community be doing outside of short-term rentals to support the preservation of important neighborhood characteristics. Communication was the main response. One participant shared that “communication in general is great.” This participant commended this public engagement process as it was a place where “we know what the neighbor’s concerns are, if there’s anything that we need to do differently, or if there’s something that is going wrong that we could fix before it being a problem. Because, you know, it’s one of those things where if you don’t know, then you don’t know to fix it.” This participant shared that they were worried about problems becoming bigger than they needed to be because people didn’t communicate.

Another participant shared that respectful forums were important and this this was an excellent process. A place where people could voice their concerns was important. Another seconded this sentiment. This participant stated that communication was key for their short-term rental and they “tried to get to know all of the neighbors around our rental, and we’ve shared contact information. A lot of them stopped by if we are on the property.” This participant attended previous meetings and encouraged not only the short-term rental owners/operators to introduce themselves to their neighbors, but for the neighbors to “really step up, make an effort to get to know who the owners are, and reach out, I would encourage both sides to reach out and get to know each other and share contact information.” This participant closed their sharing by stating “I think if you can do that, things can go a lot better. And some of the negative feelings that people have may subside.”

ANALYSIS

Key takeaways are **bolded** in the text below.

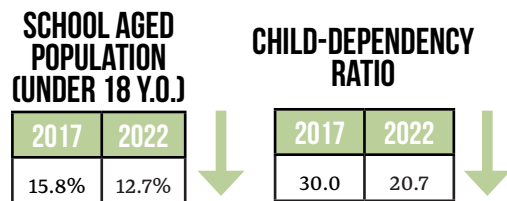
This public engagement process illuminated a complex interplay between short-term rentals, housing dynamics, and community character in Weaverville. **“Short-term rental” is defined differently depending on who you ask and the perception of how one defines short-term rental may influence their experience.** It is clear from this process that those investing in Weaverville, whether as community members, short-term rental owners/operators, or both, have a deep love for their community.

Several participants shared their beliefs of an apparent demographic or cultural shift in Weaverville. LOSRC utilized 5-Year ACS Survey Data from the United States Census to verify this belief. As a caveat, before discussing the data used by LOSRC, the United States Census only considers a person a part of a population if that person living in a housing unit at the time of the survey considers that location their usual place of residence or they have no usual place of residence elsewhere. In communities with seasonal populations or higher numbers of vacation homes, population numbers may be skewed and may not present an accurate picture of demographic change. Further, population figures do not illustrate the proportion of homes owned by a particular demographic segment or by those living in a particular location.

The 2022 and 2017 ACS 5-Year population estimates for Weaverville are 4,599 and 3,857 individuals, respectively. The 2022 ACS 5-Year Surveys list the median age for Weaverville at 53.5 and Asheville at 42.2 years old. The 2017 ACS 5-Year Survey lists the median age for Weaverville and Asheville at 52 and 38.6 years old, respectively. **These figures show that Weaverville is growing, but, compared to Asheville, Weaverville’s population has not become significantly older on average.** This is supported by the percentage of the population of those older than 60 in Weaverville, which, per the 2022 and 2017 ACS 5-Year Surveys, shows that the proportion of the population entering retirement age was 39.4% in 2022 and 40.5% in 2017.

Despite the median age of Weaverville remaining roughly the same, Weaverville’s population is aging. The 2022 and 2017 ACS 5-Year Surveys show that the proportion of Weaverville’s population under 18 years old decreased from 15.8% in 2017 to 12.7% in 2022. Further, child dependency ratios, per the 2017 and 2022 ACS 5-Year Surveys, decreased from 30.0 in 2017 to 20.7 in 2022. Child dependency ratios

are a measure of dependency of those 0-17 years old on a community’s working-age population. This figure is often used as a measure of whether a population is “too young” or “too old.” Higher child dependency ratios (those closer to 1.0) indicate larger proportions of a population being under 17 years old. These figures demonstrate that **the proportion of Weaverville’s population under 17 is falling leading to a population where comparatively more of the residents are older than in previous years.**



SOURCE (BOTH): 2017 ACS-5 YEAR WEAVERVILLE & 2022 ACS 5-YEAR WEAVERVILLE

Additional evidence of a demographic shift to an older population can be seen in the proportional breakdown of Weaverville’s working age population, as shown below, of those between 20 and 59 using data from the 2017 and 2022 ACS 5-Year Census. This table shows that the largest increases in the composition of the population between 2017 and 2022 are from those between 40 and 59 years old, while the number of individuals between 20 and 29 has decreased. Based on this table and the aforementioned data, the proportion of younger Weaverville residents and those under 29 decreased from 2017 to 2022. **The proportional composition of Weaverville’s population, despite the median age remaining unchanged, has become older. How much of this shift is a direct result of cultural shifts, housing shortages, or short-term rentals is unclear.**

WORKING AGE POPULATION COMPOSITION CHANGE

AGE BRACKET	2017 %	2022 %	% CHANGE
20 to 29	11%	8%	-29%
30 to 39	10%	11%	11%
40 to 49	10%	12%	27%
50 to 59	12%	16%	34%

SOURCE: 2017 ACS-5 YEAR WEAVERVILLE & 2022 ACS 5-YEAR WEAVERVILLE

The Town must ask itself where it will be in twenty or thirty years. As shown above, the proportion of those in younger age brackets is decreasing in Weaverville. Three participants in Session B, who self-identified in the 20-29 age bracket, shared direct testimonies of their challenges in finding and purchasing housing. These participants could not find available or affordable housing. The continued

loss of those under 29 years old as a proportion of the Town's population may dramatically impact Weaverville.

Both new and long-term residents, independent of age, experienced challenges with availability and affordability in securing housing in Weaverville. While long-term residents shared that house prices were more affordable twenty years ago compared to today, the challenge of housing availability may be historic in Weaverville. Two residents, with over twenty years of time in between each of them purchasing their respective dwellings, shared the same challenge of finding a home. Two participants also shared their difficulty in finding long-term rentals in Weaverville.

The 2022 ACS 5-Year Census identified 2,419 total housing units in Weaverville in 2022. Of that 2022 figure, 1,962 were considered occupied housing units. The United States Census considers a housing unit occupied if a person is living in it at the time of the survey or if the occupants are only temporarily absent, for example, on vacation. A housing unit is considered vacant if no one is living in it at the time of the survey unless its occupants are only temporarily absent. A vacant unit may also be one entirely occupied by persons who have a usual residence elsewhere. Per the 2022 ACS 5-Year Census, most of the occupied housing units in Weaverville were built prior to 2000. As stated earlier, Weaverville's population has continued to grow from 2017 to 2022 with a 19% growth rate. While houses may have been built during this period of time that were considered vacant by the United States Census, this data shows that 742 new residents had moved to Weaverville by 2022, but only 274 occupied housing units had been built by 2020 and none had been built afterwards. **This data may indicate that housing construction, at least that portion occupied by residents, has become outpaced by population growth.** Therefore, the supply of available units for future residents continues to decrease.

OCCUPIED HOUSING-UNIT CONSTRUCTION DATE

YEAR BUILT	% OF UNITS CONSTRUCTED (#)
Before 2000	62% (1,216)
2000 - 2009	24% (471)
2010 - 2019	14% (275)
2020 - Current	0% (0)

SOURCE: 2022 ACS 5-YEAR WEAVERVILLE

Further compounding this issue, the percentage of housing units in Weaverville that were considered vacant by the United States Census per the 2017 and 2022 5-Year ACS Census, respectively, rose from 7.6% in 2017 to 18.9% in 2022. **How many of these are short-term rentals is unclear.**

While LOSRC does have short-term rental figures for Weaverville today, those figures do not reach back into 2022 and cannot be used to make this determination. It is unclear whether these vacant units and the percent increase between 2017 and 2022 are a result of actual vacancies, vacation homes, short-term rentals, homes being priced higher than what new residents could afford, or whether another factor is at play. **One must keep in mind when reviewing these figures that tourism has historically and is currently an important factor in housing in Western North Carolina. That is to say, generally, that a high vacancy rate may not indicate an increase in short-term rentals, but rather an increase in personal vacation property.** These factors aside, it is clear from this data and the testaments of the participants that housing supply is a major factor in affordability of housing Weaverville, as is the case throughout the region.

Session C provided insight into how participants acquired their short-term rentals. Most short-term rentals were either a former dwelling or rental unit or new construction. Several participants across all three sessions shared that they had constructed a new dwelling specifically to be a short-term rental and did not remove an existing dwelling from the existing housing stock. While short-term rentals may contribute to a decrease in housing stock, the larger issue may be a need for greater supply as demonstrated earlier by the housing construction figures from the 2022 5-Year ACS Census. However, participants acknowledged challenges around increasing supply such as lack of available land due to mountainous terrain and sufficient water service.

Housing affordability in Weaverville, while affected by the availability of housing in the Town, may be an issue with roots beyond the boundary of Weaverville. Price increases driven by externalities, like the 2008 financial crisis and COVID-19 migration, may be major factors behind affordability issues, similar to the rest of the region, state, and nation. The median value of owner-occupied housing in Weaverville has increased over the last five years, per the 2017 and 2022 5-Year ACS Surveys, as shown in the table below. In the same time period, per the 1-Year ACS Survey, similar increases were seen across the United States and North Carolina with the median value of owner-occupied housing increasing by 47.5% and 64%, respectively.

CHANGE IN MEDIAN VALUE OF OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSING

MEDIAN VALUE OF OWNER OCCUPIED HOUSING (2017)	MEDIAN VALUE OF OWNER OCCUPIED HOUSING (2022)	% CHANGE
\$257,700	\$423,000	64%

SOURCE: 2017 ACS-5 YEAR WEAVERVILLE & 2022 ACS 5-YEAR WEAVERVILLE

While larger-scale studies looking at the impact of short-term rentals, such as those mentioned by LOTSAR in Session A, may not be exactly representative of Weaverville, one needs only to look at larger trends throughout the state and nation to agree that housing affordability is a symptom of many factors. **However, these existing issues may be exacerbated by the conversion of long-term rentals or for-purchase residences to short-term rentals, particularly in desirable downtown walkable areas. The extent to which this occurs in Weaverville is unclear.**

Based on information from the short-term rental owners and operators in Session C, most short-term rentals have been in operation for more than one year and were purchased between January 1, 2019, and December 31, 2021. These polls may indicate that there are no short-term rentals in Weaverville that have been in operation for less than six months and none were purchased after January 1, 2022. This is particularly interesting as one participant in Session B questioned whether a market change was occurring and affecting the establishment of new short-term rentals. However, these responses represent only a fraction of short-term rentals in Weaverville. Additionally, the final poll in Session C, with eight responses, did indicate that all the short-term rentals of those who responded were occupied more than 30 days per year. **It is unclear whether a market shift is occurring with respect to short-term rentals and, if there is one, to what extent this would alleviate supply issues and impact affordability.**

When asked in Session B to share experiences about purchasing a home based on the amount of time a participant had lived in Weaverville, there was an important distinction between respondents of older and younger age brackets. Those of older age brackets shared that their experiences purchasing their first homes were very different compared to those purchasing now. While their incomes are likely higher than that of younger generations, these participants still acknowledged that those who “got in early” have benefitted and questioned how anyone these days could purchase a home in or outside Weaverville. One participant shared “I would just love to see people be able to have children that can walk to school and walk to the library or at least not being too far away. And I’d love to be able to get back there.” Those of older age brackets acknowledged that the inability of younger age brackets to purchase housing is not sustainable. As discussed earlier, the composition of Weaverville’s population is aging, even if its median age is not.

Younger age brackets, barring specific situations, are not able to compete with older age brackets or with those out

of state from wealthier markets. The three participants in the younger age bracket from Session B all shared their experiences of not being able to purchase or rent housing in Weaverville. One participant, in particular, observed that “when people want to live here, but then can’t afford it, because the price is too high, there’s such limited availability of housing, they will go to other bigger markets like Charlotte or Raleigh, where there’s more job opportunities. So in the long-term, you know, small towns like Weaverville and other towns in the area will really lose out on, you know, future economic benefits if this condition persists and people go other places.” **While availability was a challenge across both groups, it is more difficult for younger age brackets to purchase or rent housing in Weaverville.** Affordability in Weaverville is a symptom of larger economic issues throughout the country, such as rising interest rates. **How much of an impact of short-term rentals have on affordability is unclear, but the major factor in housing affordability in Weaverville may be a challenge of availability.**

For most short-term rental owners, affordability was also a factor in their decision to pursue a short-term rental in Weaverville. In Session C, participants shared how short-term rentals enabled them to purchase their homes and either join or remain a part of Weaverville’s community. Without short-term rentals, these residents may not be able to afford to live in Weaverville.

Important characteristics of Weaverville neighborhoods shared across all three sessions included relationships with neighbors, sense of community, sense of safety and feelings of “eyes on the street”, and diversity of neighbors. Walkability was also noted as an important characteristic, but this was a location-dependent element. Those moving to Weaverville, both short-term rental owners and not, cited these characteristics, family connections to the area, and “falling in love with Weaverville” as the drivers that precipitated their purchase. **Falling in love with Weaverville was a common thread expressed by many throughout this process.**

How these characteristics have changed over time depended on location. Some locations observed negative changes in their neighborhoods, while others observed neutral or positive impacts. However, generally, changes include not knowing who lives on the street or who to call if there’s a problem and having fewer connections with neighbors. Specific to short-term rentals, feelings of homes becoming businesses and no responsibility for property maintenance were identified. As far as not knowing their neighbors, one must ask how much of this

can be attributed to a cultural shift from valuing public-facing lives to more privacy rather than this being a result of new short-term rentals.

There are both preemptive and actual concerns over the impacts on community character from short-term rentals. Preemptive concerns shared were generalized and appeared to be a reaction to protect valuable existing neighborhood characteristics, such as being afraid of losing the “sense of neighborliness”. Others shared concrete examples of direct experiences including dark houses on streets, trash repeatedly left out, or amenities left outside to deteriorate. It is important to note that only three participants voiced concerns related to property management during these sessions and each emphasized their perception of a lack of “concern for the neighborhood and community” by the short-term rental owner.

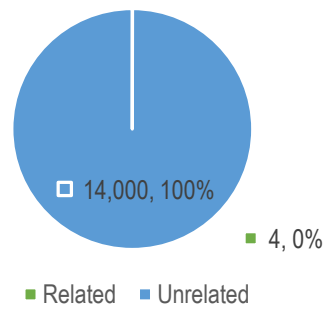
For the most part, positive upkeep of short-term rentals appeared to be consistent and was not of large concern.

Reports from the Town’s Public Works Department, which manages municipal trash service, did not note any increases in service or trash being left out related to short-term rentals. Most participants shared that the short-term rental owners in their neighborhoods took good care of their properties. The short-term rental owners themselves seconded this testament stating that they needed to maintain their properties to best run their business.

Other actions short-term rental owners take to be positive elements of their communities include meeting the neighbors, forming relationships, sharing contact information, and becoming or remaining members of their communities. **It appears that those short-term rental owners viewed positively by the community are those who make a concerted effort to connect with those around their short-term rentals.** They know the neighbors of their short-term rental and work to maintain those relationships. When compared to long-term rentals, Session C participants shared anecdotes of challenges with long-term renters. One even shared that they converted their long-term rental to a short-term rental because of a bad experience with a tenant. Short-term rental owners and operators shared that they are more invested in their properties than long-term rental managers are because they rely on reviews as a part of their business. Additionally, the demographics of short-term rental guests, as shared by a few of Session C’s participants, indicated that guests who stayed in Weaverville were typically older than 30. **The older age of guests staying in short-term rentals in Weaverville may have resulted in fewer disturbances.**

This observation is supported by reports from the Town’s Police Department.

Percentage of Law Enforcement Calls Related to Short-Term Rentals (July 2021 - Feb 2023)



SOURCE: WEAVERVILLE PLANNING DEPARTMENT CORRESPONDENCE WITH WEAVERVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT SEPTEMBER 12, 2023

As a note, during the sessions, participants shared that there is “less of an issue” with rooms-for-rent rather than whole house rentals as the owner/operator is on-site. However, a poll in Session C indicated that half of owners may not be staying on-site during a guest’s stay. This “less of an issue” mentality may be more due to the approach the individual short-term rental owner takes to manage their property, rather than the type of rental the property is.

Tourism is an important piece of the economy in Weaverville. The economic impact of short-term rentals cannot be understated. Short-term rentals support and enhance local businesses. Further, short-term rentals themselves are also local businesses as most are locally owned and operated. A poll in Session C indicated that most short-term rental owners/operators live in Weaverville full-time. One resident that was born and raised in Weaverville and built their short-term rental in 2020 shared that “I would say for the Town council you know give them credit in my lifetime this is the most vibrant main streets ever been and if you look at those businesses I would say 90 of them live off of uh tourists they’re tourist driven”. **The impact of short-term rentals on the local economy should not be discounted in future decisions both in terms of economic growth and opportunities for entrepreneurship.** Short-term rental owners are both community members and contributors to the local economy. Participants provided suggestions in Session C as to how the Town can capitalize on this.

It would be remiss to not address in this report the concerns shared by several participants over LLCs and “corporate Air BnBs”. Participants shared concerns over the impact these entities had on housing affordability and availability, as well as community character. It is important to note

that many locally owned businesses, including short-term rentals, operate as LLCs. During these sessions, short-term rental owners and operators shared that their properties are owned by “LLCs” for tax purposes even though they are permanent members of the community. An LLC does not necessarily mean that the property owner is not local or invested in Weaverville. Participants shared experiences throughout all three sessions of how the short-term rental owners in their neighborhoods contributed positively to their communities, both from owners residing locally and those residing out of state. Short-term rental owners, independent of being an LLC, contribute positively to their communities by meeting the neighbors, forming relationships, sharing contact information, and becoming or remaining members of their communities. Negative impacts explicitly experienced by participants who knew the short-term rental owner was either an LLC or “corporate Air Bnb” applied to one specific location. Outside of this location, other concerns shared were speculative in nature as they were not tied to concrete evidence that these entities were directly impacting housing affordability and availability and community character. **This is not to say that higher purchasing power or owners who do not connect with their communities are not relevant elements to this examination, rather ownership structure itself is less of a factor in determining and managing negative impacts from short-term rentals compared to management approaches by individual short-term rental owners and operators.** The state of North Carolina’s State

Statute, which delegates land use regulation authority to municipalities, does not permit the regulation of property ownership. The state delegates regulatory power for a municipality to regulate land use, but not land ownership. Two foundational court cases provide the framework for this distinction: 1981 *Graham Court Associates v. Town Council of Chapel Hill* and 2008 *City of Wilmington v. Hill*. Owner-occupant requirements and regulations based on ownership are not legally enforceable. **Should the Town implement any regulations that define who can own property and in what form, such as an “individual”, a “trust”, a “corporation”, or an “LLC”, it will encounter future litigation.** By focusing the community’s energy on the issue of the ownership structure of short-term rentals, the community is not addressing the real issues it is facing and proactively planning to protect the vibrancy and vitality of Weaverville.

To close, it is clear from this engagement process that those who participated have a deep love and appreciation for their community. The actions the Town Council takes today will pave the way for future generations living in Weaverville. By continuing to have open lines of communication and making decisions based on evidence, the Town’s future will remain bright.