

GOVERNMENT + POLITICS, LAND USE + PLANNING

# #Charlottesville reverberates less publicly in county next door



EMILY HAYS  
@amihatt

8 MIN READ

Thursday, August 15, 2019, at 11:51 PM



Albemarle County Board of Supervisors members Ann H. Mallek and Supervisor Diantha McKeel review an exhibit on John Henry James in the County Office Building on McIntire Road. The county on Wednesday, July 17 unveiled a traveling exhibit commemorating and contextualizing James' 1898 lynching.

Credit: Mike Kropf/Charlottesville Tomorrow

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## Albemarle quietly one of few local governments with equity office

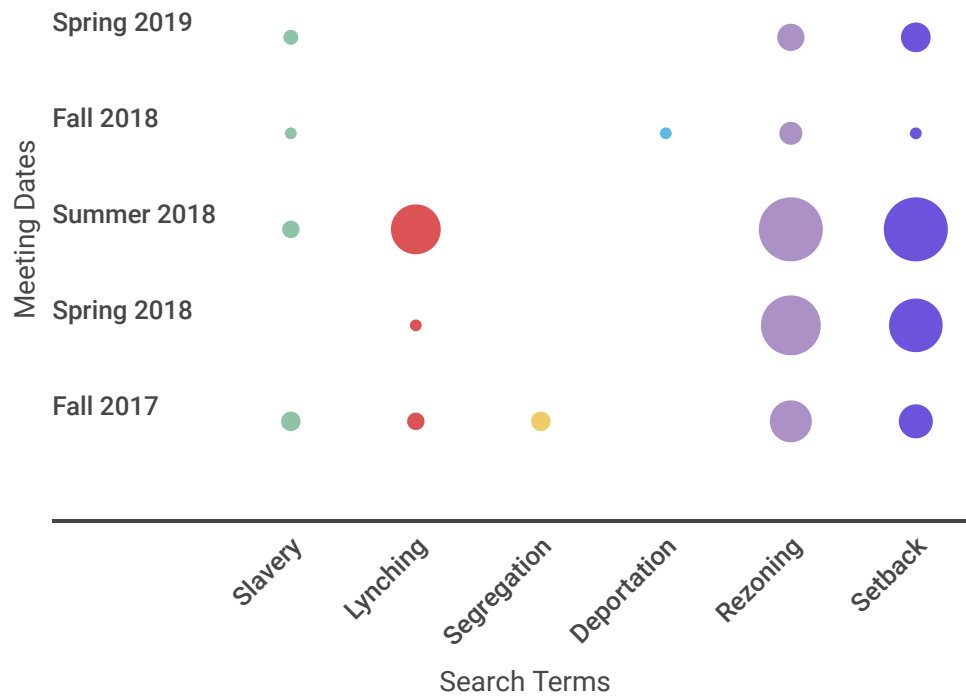
The hearing late July on redeveloping the Southwood Mobile Home Park was an unusual Albemarle County meeting in many ways.

Audience members overflowed the auditorium where the meeting was being held. Spanish-speaking residents of the park listened to the meeting through a translator arranged by the developer Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville. And both audience members and members of the Albemarle Planning Commission deliberating about the project spoke explicitly about race and racism.

While the white supremacist rallies in August 2017 that turned Charlottesville into a hashtag have shaken the way the city discusses policy, the reverberations have been less public in the county government next door.

Terms like “racism” and “white supremacy” are now part of every Charlottesville City Council meeting, either in speeches by activists or in discussions by councilors. But in more than 1,500 pages of Albemarle Board of Supervisors meeting minutes, “racism” and “white supremacy” came up a combined total of 10 times between Aug. 12, 2017, and April of this year.

## Topics in Albemarle Minutes



7

Number of times "white supremacy" or "white supremacist" appears in Board of Supervisors meeting minutes



5

Number of times "racism" or "racist" appears in the minutes

This chart maps when certain search terms appeared in Albemarle County Board of Supervisors minutes ([available here](#)). These terms represent multiple related words (ex. "slave", "enslave", "slaveholder") and exclude clearly unrelated uses (ex. "Crozet Deport and Crozet Square"). For the purposes of this chart, spring ends with the last day of April and summer ends before Aug. 12.

[This PDF](#) contains the full list of keywords searched and the total number of times each keyword appeared.

Credit: Emily Hays/Charlottesville Tomorrow

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Board of Supervisors Chairman Ned Gallaway said he thought the substance of policy and votes were a better measure of whether the board was achieving racial equity than a keyword search.

One reason for that, Gallaway said, is that the most productive conversations about race and equity happen in less public settings than the board’s meetings.

“Race is a very emotional, personal item to discuss,” Gallaway said. “For change to happen, if you’re going to move the needle or persuade people to think differently or feel differently about it, then it

plays out in experiences like the pilgrimage.”

Gallaway and Supervisors Diantha McKeel and Norman Dill participated in a pilgrimage between Charlottesville and Montgomery, Alabama, during the first anniversary of the white supremacist rallies that happened in the summer of 2017.

The pilgrimage began and ended with commemorations of John Henry James, an African American ice cream salesman who was lynched in Albemarle in 1898. In between, roughly 100 people toured civil rights sites and museums by bus to learn about the past that lives on in the present, C-VILLE Weekly reported.

University of Virginia professor Frank Dukes, who specializes in collaborative planning and also was on the pilgrimage, said that the answer to whether local governments need to discuss race and class to achieve racial equity “is as about absolutely yes as you can possibly have.”

“If we don’t, then we tend to replicate some of the harms and some of the practices from the past,” Dukes said.

Dukes offered the example of opposition in his neighborhood to new apartments being proposed on Rio Road in the context of a housing shortage that disproportionately affects people of color.

“Even though people would vehemently deny that there’s anything racist about opposing more density and development, nonetheless, it has racial implications that are more harmful to people of color than they are to people who are white,” he said.

Dukes has argued that silence and inaction around past harms also make communities less able to deal with change. In a chapter of a 2011 book called “Collaborative Resilience: Moving Through Crisis to Opportunity,” Dukes and two co-authors drew lessons from efforts to reckon with past traumas in Bainbridge Island, Washington; Greensboro, North Carolina; and at UVA.

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## Albemarle’s Office of Equity and Inclusion



Soil from the site of the lynching of John Henry James sits in a vessel in the Albemarle County Office Building. The county on Wednesday, July 17 unveiled a traveling exhibit commemorating and contextualizing the 1898 lynching.

Credit: Mike Kropf/Charlottesville Tomorrow

In one way, Albemarle is more active and forward-thinking about equity than many local governments around the country.

Albemarle founded its Office of Equity and Inclusion in late 2018. It currently is a one-woman department, but Director Siri Russell is looking to hire a second full-time employee.

ICMA, which stands for International City/County Management Association, surveyed its members in November 2018 about whether their local governments had chief equity or diversity officer positions. Only 6% of those who responded said that they did.

ICMA's membership includes roughly half of the 4,000 local government managers in the U.S.

The city of Charlottesville does not have any equity or diversity officers, but it is considering creating up to three such positions.

Russell's office has coordinated ongoing county remembrance efforts for James. She has also partnered with other individuals and organizations to tell a more complete history of Albemarle that includes more women and people of color through markers and exhibits, Russell said.

In addition to these symbols of inclusion, Russell's office is establishing a baseline for future work on systemic inequalities based on results from a citizen survey.

Russell said that as she started her department, she talked to equity offices elsewhere, including in somewhat rural places like Fort Collins, Colorado, and Champaign, Illinois. She said that she asked the departments about how they were defining success and what they would do if they could start over.

"One of the things in a lot of places that was lacking was that preliminary understanding of what the baseline was. We were talking to folks who were maybe three to four years in, and now they were saying they were working on metrics," Russell said.

With the help of UVa's Initiative for the Study of Equity Through Community Engaged Scholarship and the UVa School of Architecture, Russell plans to pair quantitative data with stories of Albemarle residents collected at laundromats, schools, country stores and other unusual places of engagement.

Russell's office spans all kinds of equity and diversity – race, place, gender, income and more. She said that she knows county residents participate in conversations about race, at the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center, for example, and how the county plans to approach race as a public conversation will be unveiled in several months.

"For us in the county, we have not necessarily been having a conversation about race," Russell said. "We're still growing in both our comfort and our capacity to engage in some pretty complex conversations that have not always been a part of our organizational dialogue or language."

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## Activism elsewhere



The Hate-Free Schools Coalition of Albemarle County organized a protest at a School Board meeting on Aug. 30, 2018.

Credit: File photo

Much of the public conversation about race in Albemarle has focused on its school system, thanks to an anti-racist group called the Hate-Free Schools Coalition of Albemarle County.

The group is made up of parents of children currently or formerly in Albemarle County Public Schools and its activism was prompted directly by the Aug. 11 and 12, 2017, white supremacist rallies.

Moxham said that the school system seemed unprepared to talk about the trauma of the rallies with students or support students who wanted to protest systemic racism.

“There was such an uncomfortableness, even a real lack of ability to comprehend how deeply traumatizing that event was for our entire community,” Moxham said. “Whether you live in the city or the county, it literally happened here.”

Hate-Free Schools successfully has pushed county schools to remove Lee-Jackson Day from its calendar and to interpret its dress code to exclude Confederate imagery. The coalition still is pushing for more symbolic changes, arguing that these impact student health and achievement.

Moxham said that the limited time available to Hate-Free Schools parents after work has prevented activism from spilling over into the Board of Supervisors meetings, which start in the early afternoon. However, she said that she strongly supports Russell’s work with the county’s equity office.

Another focus of county activism has been the Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail’s policy of notifying Immigration and Customs Enforcement when undocumented immigrants are scheduled to be released from jail.

Albemarle County resident Edgar Lara said that while Aug. 12 was a defining moment for the region, the Latino community he serves as community engagement director of Sin Barreras is more afraid of ongoing policies like ICE notification.

An estimated 300,000 undocumented people are driving without a license in Virginia. Lara said that these are families that want to act legally but are barred from doing so, and that the stress of getting caught and then possibly deported makes immigrant families live in constant fear.

Lara is himself a citizen and a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, but he said that he does not want to distance himself from the minority within the Latino community that are undocumented. Lara said that even with citizenship, his community faces racism.

“I’ve had to deal with it all my life, with the jobs that I’ve had,” Lara said. “You don’t always name it and are not always aware, but upon reflection, yeah, it’s always been there.”

Approximately 20% of Albemarle residents are African American, Asian or Latino or a combination of the above identities. The total number of non-white county residents exceeds the number of non-white people in Charlottesville.

One balm for that fear that Lara suggested is Sin Barreras’ annual Cville Sabroso Festival. The festival, which celebrates Latin American dance, food and activities, is scheduled for Sept. 21 at the IX Art Park.

The Board of Supervisors is scheduled to vote on the Southwood redevelopment project during its Wednesday meeting.

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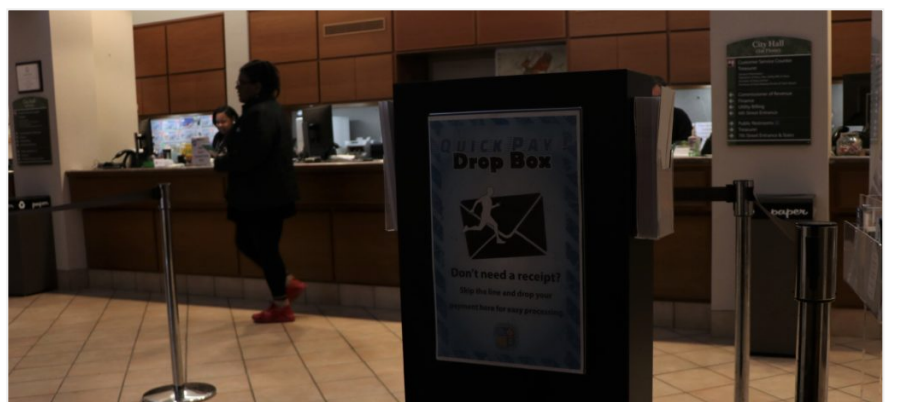
Emily Hays grew up in Charlottesville and graduated from Yale in 2016. She covers growth, development, and affordable living. Before writing for Charlottesville Tomorrow, she produced a podcast on education and caste in Maharashtra, India.

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# Community to be displaced in Belmont Apartment renovation



EMILY HAYS  
@amihatt

4 MIN READ

Thursday, April 11, 2019, at 10:03 AM



Delma Buchanan, lifelong Belmont resident, stands outside the Belmont Apartments.

Credit: Emily Hays/Charlottesville Tomorrow

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Delma Buchanan takes care of her neighbors, whether that means driving a neighbor with a disability to the grocery store or allowing a depressed friend to sleep in her La-Z-Boy chair after a midnight talk. She said that it does her good and gives her something to do.

The idea of losing that strong community is part of why Buchanan, a lifelong Belmont resident, was so shocked and saddened to see that her month-to-month lease at the Belmont Apartments in Charlottesville is being terminated.

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“When I got this notice, the first thing I did was sit down, start crying and have a panic attack. It feels like you’re having a heart attack, and sweat just pours,” Buchanan said.

Buchanan said that she called her doctor and told him she really needed to see him.

“I could not drive, because I was afraid if I got in my car, I’d have a wreck. I was so jittery and out of it, so I got one of my neighbors to take me,” Buchanan said.

Buchanan said that she is one of 14 individuals and families in the apartments who were notified in March that their month-to-month leases will end on May 5. She said that, like her, approximately 10 were long-time residents of the buildings.

The apartment complex includes two two-story brick buildings at 1000 Monticello Road in the Belmont neighborhood. The Legal Aid Justice Center, which has offered to represent residents in case of eviction, met 13 residents through door-knocking, nine of whom said they had received notice to leave by May. The group of residents was racially diverse and most said that they lived on fixed incomes.



The Belmont Apartments were family-owned until 2018, when Core Real Estate purchased the property. This February, the apartment complex changed hands again when Piedmont Realty Holdings III LLC bought the property for \$2.75 million.

In a prepared statement, owner Drew Holzwarth said that he bought the apartment complex partially to provide necessary repairs.

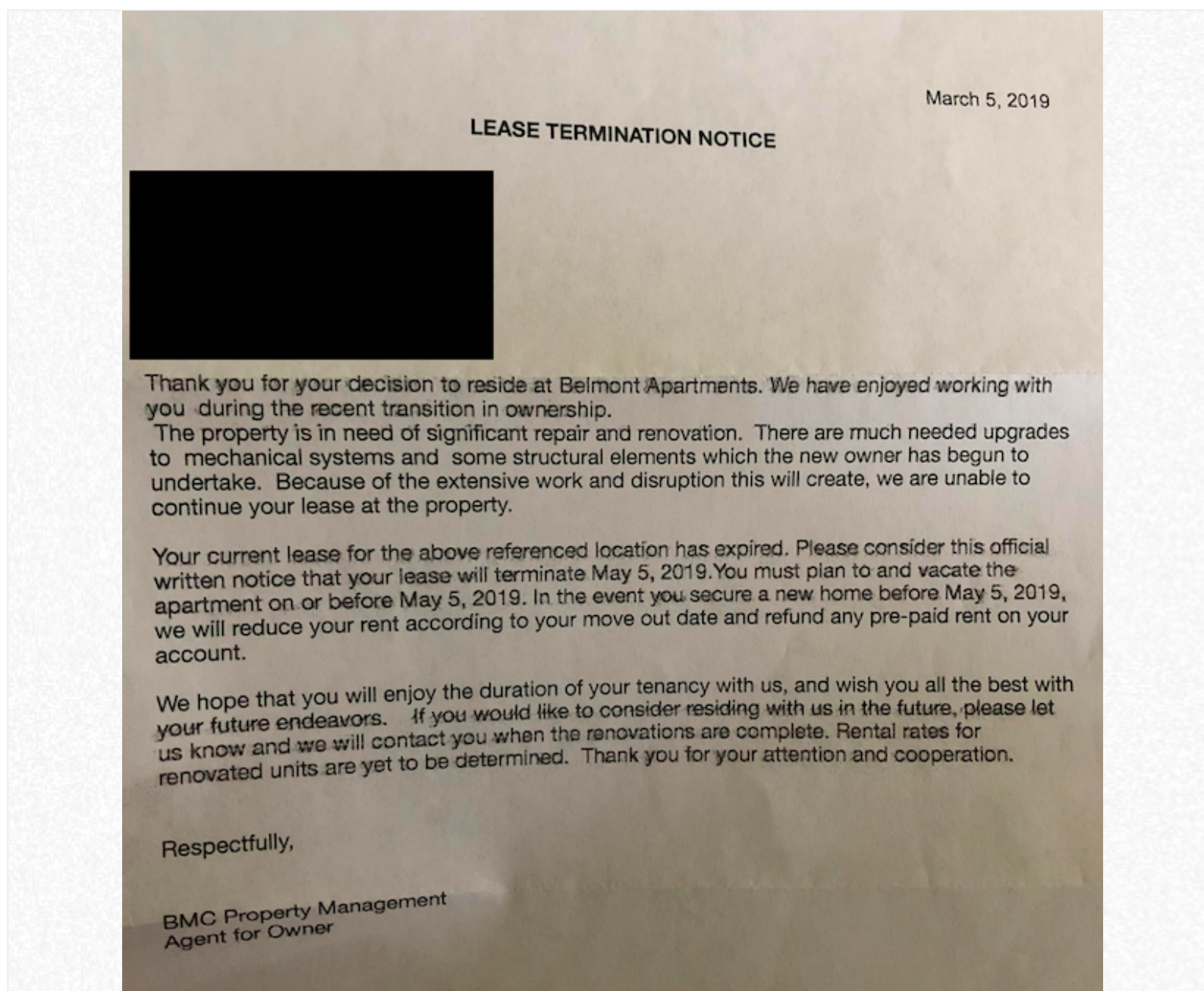
“Unfortunately, the serious nature of the required repairs means that the work cannot be done while the apartments are occupied,” the statement said. “We hope the misinformation about our building can stop and people can begin to see this renovation for what it is — an effort to improve and repair a property desperately needing it.”

Buchanan agreed that her apartment needs maintenance. She said that her electricity bill climbed to almost \$300 last month because heat leaked out of the doors and windows.

Sarah Ballard, of BMC Property Management, which is managing the apartment complex, said that it is too soon to say what rents will be after the renovation, and it will depend on the costs of the repairs, which would include replacing windows.

“I think that’s everybody’s vision – that a landlord has more money than they do – but there are costs associated with being a landlord too. You have debt. You have an obligation to maintain a property,” Ballard said.





Some residents of the Belmont Apartments received lease termination notices on March 5.

Long-term residents like Buchanan rented the one- and two-bedroom apartments for between \$500 and \$800 a month.

According to a recent assessment of housing in the region, there's a scarcity of such apartments in Charlottesville and Albemarle County. Study author Partners for Economic Solutions found the average rate of one-bedroom apartments was \$968 on Zillow and \$1,044 on Craigslist, based on searches conducted on Dec. 15, 2018.

There are few protections for tenants like Buchanan. The property owners are respecting existing leases, but many leases had expired in the transition between property owners.

Caroline Klosko, an attorney with Legal Aid who works on housing and criminal law, said that lawyers defending tenants have to focus on technicalities like the length of the notice period in eviction cases.

"You're not directly addressing the root of housing problems in Charlottesville, which is that rents are skyrocketing, and people are being displaced. On the individual level, there just isn't very much that you can do about that," Klosko said.

Ballard said that residents should call her if they have concerns about the notices. She said that she has called other landlords to find housing options for one resident and wants to connect residents to community services.

"Communication is key with any project like this. We are all humans. We do not want anyone homeless," Ballard said.

Buchanan has found an apartment that she is happy with. She likes her new landlord and said that the rent includes utilities, so her housing costs will stay approximately the same or decrease. Still, she said that rent is more than half of her monthly income and that it was the cheapest apartment she could find. She said that she hopes some of her neighbors will find places near her.

“I’m going on 73 years old, and who feels like moving? And then can’t get any help, you know?” Buchanan said.

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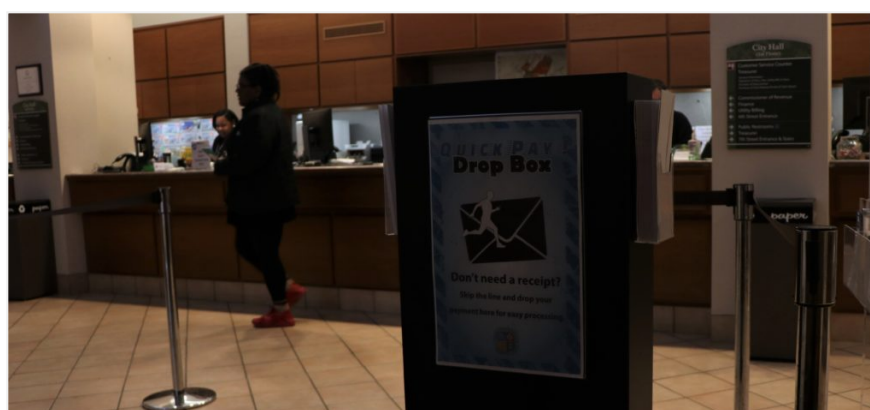
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# County nears completion of new homestay rules



EMILY HAYS  
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5 MIN READ  
Friday, April 26, 2019, at 3:48 PM



Thea Tupelo-Schneck used Airbnb to convert half of her house in the Key West neighborhood of Albemarle County into a homestay.

Credit: Emily Hays/Charlottesville Tomorrow

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On Wednesday, Thea Tupelo-Schneck was sweeping and folding sheets after her most recent visitors departed. She lives with her husband and three kids in one half of their Albemarle County home, and they rent the three bedrooms, kitchen, living room, porch and garage to short-term visitors.

“It’s a lot like having a foreign exchange student or friends from out of town,” she said. “They had a little boy who didn’t speak a word of English. My little boy didn’t speak a word of Chinese, but they managed to play badminton out on the lawn.”

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Tupelo-Schneck first listed her house on Airbnb three years ago when she realized her job would not allow her to pay off her student loans within the next decade. She was teaching the Alexander Technique, a form of mindfulness of daily movements often used by actors and performers, and her income was inconsistent.

She has a permit from the county to operate her Airbnb but did not know she needed one when she started. She only learned about the requirement when she saw recent news coverage of the county's plans to update their rules for bed and breakfasts.

"The minute we read that there were regulations, we applied," she said.



Thea Tupelo-Schneck leans on the guest entrance to her home in Key West.

Credit: Emily Hays/Charlottesville Tomorrow

There are many homestays — the county's new official terminology for tourist lodging and bed and breakfasts — operating without permits in the county. One of the county's goals in updating its ordinance is to bring such errant homestays into the fold.

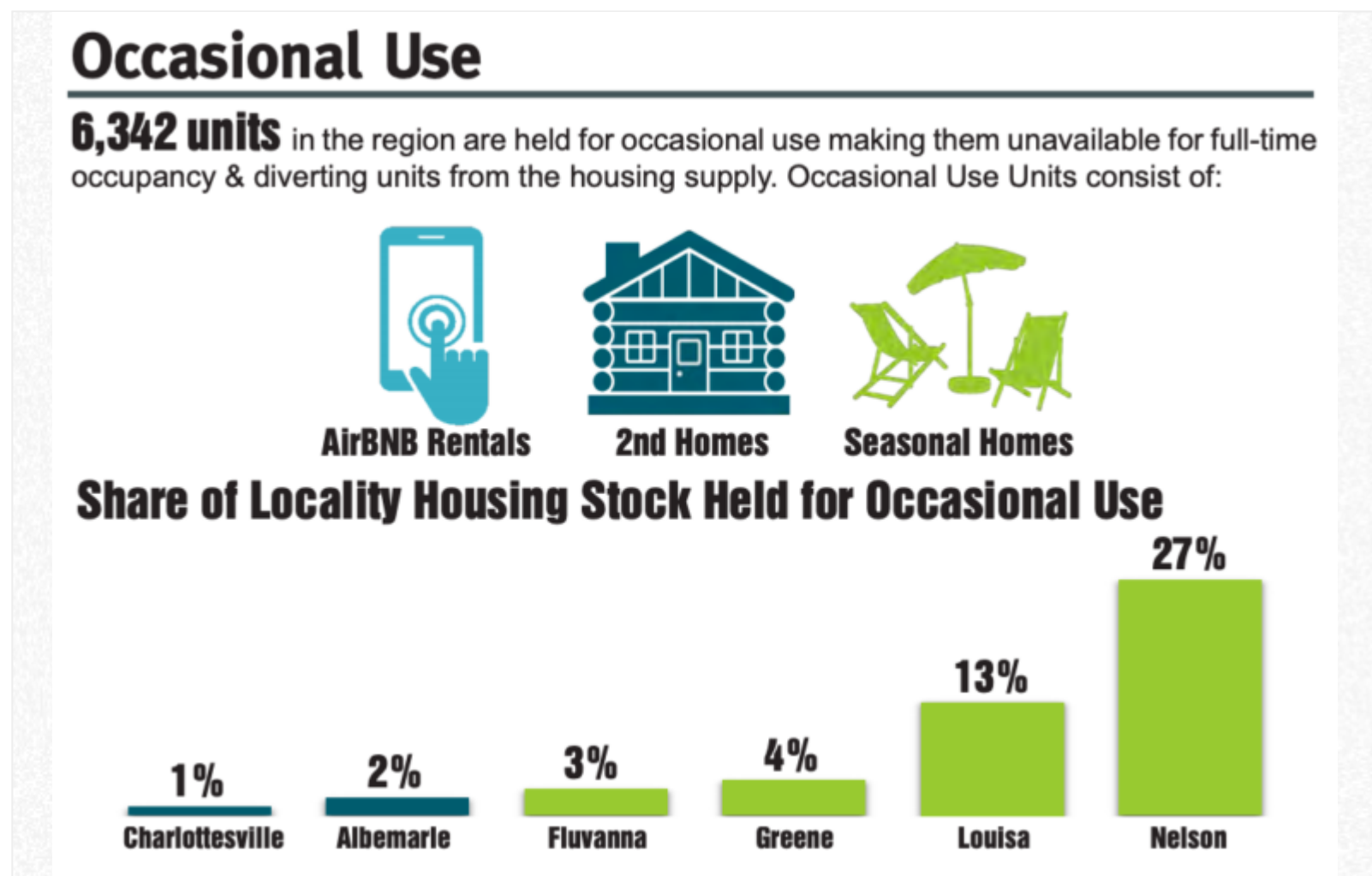
"Our hope is that a very high percentage of people will come into compliance willingly with our assistance after we educate them and work with them," said Amelia McCulley, the county's director of zoning.

After two years of work by county staff and elected and appointed officials, McCulley on Tuesday presented a final draft of the homestay ordinance to the Albemarle Planning Commission. The commissioners unanimously recommended the new rules to the Board of Supervisors, with the suggestion that they discuss several points that the commission disagreed with staff or did not reach a consensus on.

Two Albemarle residents concerned about their neighbors operating homestays spoke at the public hearing. One, a teacher named Dawn Baber, said that her new neighbors plan to pay for their mortgage through Airbnb.

"Now, they've also brought in two tiny homes and a yurt, and they have it online, prepared to rent. I don't want to be mean. I don't want to burden them, but that is hurting me and my home values and what I've worked for for the past 28 years," Baber said.

Research on the effects of Airbnb on cities has found the opposite effect — that Airbnb tends to increase home values and increase rents.



In 2010, 2% of housing in Albemarle County was vacant and reserved for occasional uses like second homes and Airbnb.

Credit: Central Virginia Regional Housing Partnership/Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission

The [housing study](#) recently completed for the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission by Partners for Economic Solutions listed Airbnb as one of the factors decreasing affordability in Charlottesville, Albemarle and surrounding counties.

The study found that in 2010, 2% of housing in Albemarle was vacant and reserved for occasional uses like second homes and Airbnb. In the meantime, rents are increasing 5.8% annually in major apartment buildings in the region. Median sales prices for houses in the city and county increased from \$325,000 in 2017 to \$349,900 in 2018.

County staff tried to balance reasonable homestay uses with the concerns about affordability, nuisance to neighbors and the demand to develop rural areas that homestays might cause.

The proposed ordinance addresses nuisance concerns by limiting the number of guest rooms, requiring space between the homestay and neighbors and requiring off-street parking. Homestays would not be allowed in apartment buildings or townhomes, and someone must be available to attempt to respond to neighbors' complaints within 30 minutes.

Only residents of large properties in rural areas would be allowed to rent their entire house — something currently not allowed in the county — and the number of days they could rent the whole house would be limited to 45 a year.

Homestay managers like Tupelo-Schneck who are complying with county rules would be able to operate under the same rules as their existing permits.

## Summary of Changes to Homestay Regulations

HOMESTAY REGULATION MATRIX	Current		Proposed		
	Residential	RA	Residential	RA under 5 ac	RA 5 ac or greater
Owner/operator or manager must reside on parcel	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Only permitted in single family detached dwellings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
All parking must be off-street		✓	✓	✓	✓
Required annual registration on short-term rental registry (§ 15.2-983)			✓	✓	✓
Annual safety inspections			✓	✓	✓
Up to 5 guest rooms	✓	✓			✓
Limited to 2 guest rooms			✓	✓	
125-foot setback from abutting lots				✓	✓
Accessory structure may be used for homestays		✓			✓
Allowed second homestay use (with development rights)		✓			✓
Special Exceptions possible			✓	✓	✓
Whole house rental for maximum 45 days/year					✓

The proposed ordinance addresses nuisance concerns by limiting the number of guest rooms, requiring space between the homestay and neighbors, and requiring off-street parking.

Credit: County of Albemarle

One rule without a consensus at the Planning Commission meeting was whether renters should be allowed to use parts of their houses as homestays. Commissioner Julian Bivins proposed that the commission or Board of Supervisors only allow homeowners that privilege in the county's urban neighborhoods.

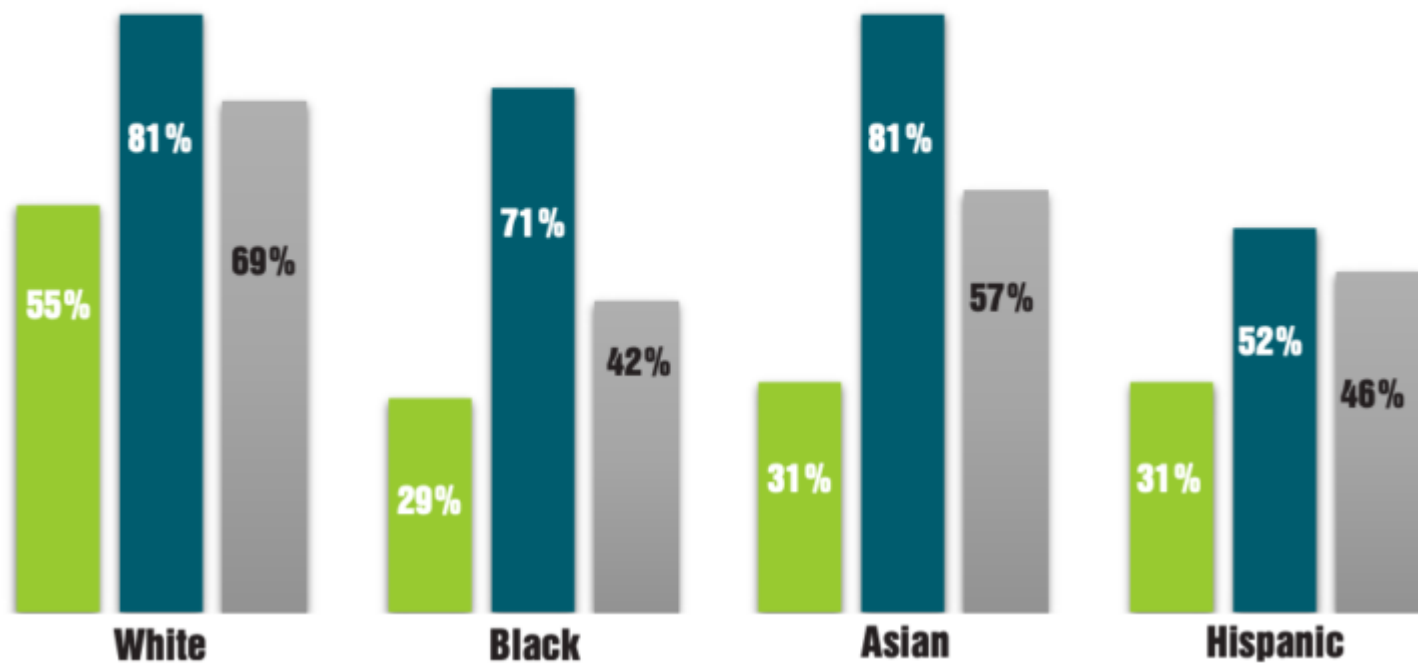
"I'm concerned that ... that actually will start to dilute the neighborhoods that we have in some of the close-in parts of our county," Bivins said. "Given that today those areas tend to be more accessible and people are closer to one another, the aspect of living together is different than it may be on 5 acres or even outside of the residential area."

Planning Commission Chairman Tim Keller said that one issue with that approach is blocking less privileged primary residents from income accessible to wealthier homeowners.

## Race & Equity Disparities in Ownership

Ownership rates vary significantly by race and ethnicity. The chart below shows the percentage of households who own their home for the identified racial groups in both the urban and rural areas.

Urban Areas Rural Areas U.S. National Average (2017 ACS Data)



White households in Charlottesville and Albemarle own homes at higher rates than African-American, Hispanic, and Asian families. This disparity is less extreme in rural counties.

Credit: Central Virginia Regional Housing Partnership/Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission

The TJPDC housing study found that 55% of white, urban households own their own home, but only 29% of African American households and 31% of Hispanic and Asian households own a home. The report also noted that some African American families in the region have passed their homes on to their children without a formal deed, which can create obstacles in qualifying for certain programs.

The commission recommended that the Board of Supervisors discuss the owner versus resident manager question along with several other concerns when they vote on whether to adopt the new rules for county homestays.

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