

Special Use Permit Application Report

Approximately eight years ago, my husband and I purchased three properties—844 College Avenue, 840 College Avenue, and 836 College Avenue—with the intention of operating them as short-term rentals (STRs). Our goal was to create a reliable source of income for our family, including our two children, while also helping to meet the growing demand for short-term lodging in Athens, particularly from tourists and University of Georgia-affiliated travelers. As our operations expanded, we established Athens Home Properties, LLC to better manage our business and finances in a professional and transparent manner. Currently, our properties are listed as legally non-conforming STRs. We are respectfully seeking to transition them to legally conforming status by applying for a Special Use Permit. We are committed to responsible ownership and community-minded practices, and we hope to continue operating these properties in full compliance with all city regulations.

Approval Criteria for a Zoning Action:

A. According to the Athens-Clarke County Future Land Use Map our properties at 844, 840 and 836 College Avenue are in the same “Downtown” category as all of Downtown, Athens (see ‘ACC Future Land Use Map.png’ attachment. We have the Lyndon House Arts Center directly East of our townhouses, to the West we have Downtown Development Authority’s Bethel Homes. Bethel Homes is also known as Bethel Midtown Village, which is being redeveloped as part of a public-private partnership, with the Athens Housing Authority playing a key role. This project, also called The View at NoDA ([North Downtown Athens Redevelopment](#)), includes public housing, subsidized housing, market-rate housing and mixed-use development. See ‘REDEVELOPMENT MASTER PLAN FOR BETHEL VILLAGE-COLLEGE - HOYT.png’ and ‘NODA-Block E - Mixed Use.png’ attachments. The ACC Fire Department is located to the South of our townhouses just past that is Hotel Indigo (which is also designated as “Downtown”). Immediately to the North of us are six houses zoned Commercial-Office and C3-Commercial. We are literally surrounded by Government Housing, Government Institutions, Commercial zoned housing and the Fire Department. It seems logical for this area to be rezoned as Commercial-Residential, but at this point in time we are only asking for a Special Use Permit.

Although the Athens-Clarke County Affordable Housing Investment Strategy Report (2023) states that “the data indicates ACC’s housing and rental markets have a constraint that STRs exacerbate, and the analysis of this data suggests that C-STRs do not give any relief to these housing issues,” prohibiting STR properties specifically within the multifamily Downtown zoning district is not a reasonable solution. This area no longer offers “natural affordability,” as property values have increased by over 300% since our purchase in 2016–2018—a trend that is also reflected in rising rents. See more below from response D-9.

B. Yes, the proposed use is in conformance with all standards within the zoning district because there is no change in the proposed use.

C. Yes, there is adequate capacity of Athens-Clarke County facilities for water, sewer, paved access to and through the development, electricity, urban storm drainage, and adequate transportation that is provided to the townhouses.

D. Will the zoning proposal have an adverse impact on the surrounding area? When evaluating the effect of the proposed use on the surrounding area, the following factors shall be considered:
1) These units have been there since 1970. Nothing has changed in terms of their scale, bulk, and coverage. They are 2 story units and will remain that way as long as we own them.

2) There is no impact on the character and volume of traffic and vehicular parking generated in the area. No noticeable impact in pedestrian, bicycle, or mass transit use.

3) We are not making any architectural changes to the property.

4) There is no impact on the environment. The townhouses have been STRs since 2017 and have never had any environmental issues. We have helped make this area much cleaner and safer than it was in the past.

5) No, we hear more noise coming from Downtown and Bethel Homes than we do from our properties. We have quiet hours posted from 8PM to 8AM and are in contact with our neighbors in the event that a nuisance needs to be dealt with. We have not had any complaints after being in operation for 8 years.

6) The development of adjacent properties is compatible with the future development map and the zoning district of Mixed-Use. See attachment "REDEVELOPMENT MASTER PLAN FOR BETHEL VILLAGE-COLLEGE - HOYT"

7) No impact on future transportation corridors.

8) The character of the neighborhood has been positively impacted by our STRs as they are kept up better than the vast majority of other townhouses on the 800 block of College Avenue

9) Over the past 20+ years, property values in Downtown Athens have steadily increased to levels that are no longer affordable for low-income buyers or renters. It's hard to find any low priced houses within a mile of Downtown. <https://portal.onehome.com/en-US/share/1007467e64166> Importantly, this trend began well before the rise of STRs. As such, attributing the main escalation in housing costs to STRs does not reflect the unique market conditions that have long shaped the Downtown area.

Downtown Athens is distinct from other parts of the city in terms of its real estate dynamics, visitor traffic, and economic opportunities. Given this, we firmly believe that STRs are the most appropriate and beneficial use of our three properties. Our rentals contribute positively to the community by:

- Enhancing the area's appeal and safety through investment and upkeep.
- Creating employment opportunities for local residents, including cleaners, maintenance professionals, and service providers.
- Accommodating guests with special needs or unique circumstances who often cannot be served by traditional lodging options.

My husband has worked as a Realtor in Athens for over 25 years. In the early 2010s, he showed apartments in the 800 block of College Avenue—at the time, an area with minimal appeal, even with rental rates as low as \$500 per month. In one instance, he encountered a squatter during a showing, highlighting the safety and condition challenges that existed then.

We were among the first property owners to begin revitalizing the townhouses on the 800 block of College Avenue. Through responsible ownership and the operation of well-managed STRs. We have helped turn underutilized or neglected properties into assets that benefit both the local area economy and Athens' reputation as a welcoming destination.

We appreciate your thoughtful consideration as you evaluate the role of STRs in our community. Our experience shows that when done responsibly, STRs can be part of the solution—not the problem.

Sincerely,

Gwyneth Moody and Daniel Peiken