

William D. Beasley
County Manager

Deputy County Managers:
Lea Ann Thomas
Joe N. Halman, Jr.
Ryan J. Taylor



Board of County Commissioners

330 West Church Street
PO Box 9005 • Drawer CA01
Bartow, Florida 33831-9005

PHONE: 863-534-6444
FAX: 863-534-7069
www.polk-county.net

The Honorable Halsey Beshears
Secretary
Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation
2601 Blair Stone Road
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1027

RE: Re-opening Vacation Rentals in Polk County

Dear Secretary Beshears:

First, let me take a moment to thank you, and the Governor, for your service to the State of Florida during this unprecedented event. Both of you have shown a steady hand on the rudder as you have guided us well through these treacherous waters. On behalf of Polk County, I ask you now to steer the ship toward the state's traditional safe harbor and powerful economic engine, tourism. Like much of the state, tourism is the backbone of Polk County, providing more than 21,000 jobs, \$460 million in wages and \$2.4 billion in economic impact.

The damage inflicted as a result of COVID-19 on Polk County has been devastating. In our countywide tourism industry, vacation rental homes amount to more than 50% of the available rooms. While many other lodging options have persevered through this period, vacation rental homes have particularly been hard hit. I also know that our good friends in Osceola County have experienced a similar fate. In fact, numerous vacation rental home management companies manage homes that are located in both counties. We have been in contact with Osceola County and have submitted a plan that is virtually identical to that of our neighbors to the east. By submitting our plan, I am asking that you mitigate the losses of this vital and, until recently, vibrant segment of our tourism industry. Your favorable view and assistance in this effort will allow this critical tourism segment the opportunity to follow not only the latest CDC guidelines, but also the guidelines provided by the State of Florida and the Vacation Rental Management Association. As you work with Governor DeSantis to safely re-open the State of Florida, Polk County respectfully requests that short term vacation rentals in Polk County be allowed to re-open under the guidelines provided herein.

Proposed: Allow short-term vacation rental reservations, and the acceptance of arriving guests in Polk County, beginning the week of May 18, the following plan will be implemented. This plan will be reviewed weekly and updated as needed.

Section 4 of Executive Order 20-123 states that Counties may seek approval to operate vacation rentals with a written request from the County Administrator and the County's safety plan for vacation rental operations submitted to you the DBPR Secretary. Please accept this letter as our written request. Should you grant us approval to operate vacation rentals, we will allow operation under the following safety plan and guidelines for vacation rental operations, plus any additional expanded guidance that you may require, in addition to following any and all of the Governor's Executive Orders:

- ✓ Property owners and managers shall adhere to all existing **Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) sanitation guidelines**, as addressed under 61C-3.001 Sanitation and Safety Requirements of the transient lodging statutes;
- ✓ Property owners and managers shall adopt and follow the **CDC related guidelines** that are for public spaces, businesses, schools and homes. These re-open guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting expand upon what the State of Florida & DBPR already have in place for safety and sanitation for all lodging. This can be an extra safety measure for protection against the spread of COVID-19. Our short term rental owners and managers are already utilizing such measures and even more stringent cleaning protocols adopted by the industry;
- ✓ Extra time must be allowed for enhanced cleaning procedures to take place between stays/guests based upon the use and application of CDC cleaning and sanitization procedures;
- ✓ Property owners and managers shall provide COVID-19 guidance of local restrictions that are in place during the guest stay including closures, curfews, and other related local information. The County will post online where this updated local information can be accessible to lodging operators and guests;
- ✓ Property owners and managers shall supply employees and contractors with CDC related safety guidance while operating the short term rental units to alleviate the transmission of the virus and provide further protection for employees and guests;
- ✓ Property owners and managers shall supply guests with CDC guidance for guests traveling with pets and service/assistance animals;
- ✓ Property owners and managers shall also share CDC resources to any guest while staying in their units. These resources are available in multiple languages at the CDC website;
- ✓ All vacation rentals shall follow the **SAFEHOME Vacation Rental Housekeeping Professional (VRHP) and Vacation Rental Management Association (VRMA) Cleaning Guidelines for COVID-19** which can be found here: <https://www.vrma.org/page/vrhplvrma-cleaning-guidelines-for-covid-19>;
- ✓ Only licensed vacation rentals may operate under this reopening plan;
- ✓ Existing guests currently in homes may continue to extend their stay;
- ✓ **Any person coming from a highly-infected area, as defined per the Governor's guidelines, should reserve a minimum stay of 14 nights and follow CDC self-quarantine guidelines;** and,

- ✓ **Vacation rentals may not be used for events or group gatherings that exceed maximum occupancy. Only Guests whose names are on the reservation are authorized to stay in the home.**

Polk County and I stand ready to work with you and your staff to discuss or provide you with any additional information you may need to approve our request. I thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. Polk County thanks you and Governor DeSantis for your continued leadership during this crisis. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



**William D. Beasley
County Manager**