SUBMISSION – DOMINIQUE NOEL

Submission for Standing Policy Committee on Property and Development, Heritage and Downtown Development regarding Regulating Short-Term Rentals

I am writing to explain how by changing the overreaching ordinances to STR and the proposition of instating more of a “Toronto model” would devastate mine among many others livelihoods… not to mention be an absolute detriment to the growth of tourism in our city.

As an avid traveler, I’ve been privileged to experience what other cities have to offer. In doing this, I was able to return to my home to fill a niche void with a business venture of my own.

I poured myself in to revitalizing a building that hadn't seen any love for decades, after navigating the cities laws and regulations (which was no easy task), I opened one of very few Bed and Breakfasts that catered to backpackers, and my b&b quickly became a much loved piece of my Saint Boniface community. My intuition paid off when I successfully owned and operated my b&b for over 2 years, hosting travelers who often say they would have just “passed through” had they not had this affordable accommodation option. I was even awarded a few accolades for entrepreneurship and this was proving to be successful until I was forced to pivot due to the COVID pandemic.

With my 15 years of working in Tourism and Hospitality, locally and abroad, I humbly consider myself somewhat of a professional when it comes to this industry. And I’m certainly proud to now be part of the Short Term Rental industry here in Winnipeg joined by many passionate, professional and responsible hosts.

To date, I've hosted 440 stays on the Airbnb platform across the past 5 years and have never experienced any of the stigmas surrounding the short term rental industry that are portrayed in the media or the past council meeting.

My short term rental spaces not only serve tourists; but they also help businesses, organizations and residents in the neighborhood. My guests are residents in my community renting while selling or renovating their homes, local wedding groups, people on work assignments wanting to stay within walking distance of their daily destination, family reunions, newcomers to Canada, patients seeking treatment at the nearby hospital and the list goes on.

They certainly are not the drug dealers or party seekers often spoken about when referencing Airbnb. Which is why I would encourage you to understand that our guests are not the bad actors ripped out of the headlines or the ones presented before you from the residents of the Glasshouse.

The city states that it "strives to be a welcoming city to all new residents, including people arriving from reserves, rural communities, other provinces or territories, or countries outside Canada." Winnipeg welcomes 10,000 newcomers every year and as you've heard other hosts mention in past meetings, for some of us these newcomers to Canada make up a good portion of our guests. In the city's "Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy" it suggests for municipalities to create a welcoming community and attract and retain newcomers by:

Identifying and removing barriers

Promoting a sense of belonging

Meeting diverse individual needs

Offering services that promote successful integration

Please keep in mind that many of us hosts who have been the first point of reference for newcomers or families of newcomers and are consistently providing a space and guidance in line with the key priorities in this policy. By restricting primary use or limiting the number of nights, it will severely deplete these accommodation options for newcomers to Canada. Short term rentals fill a void that cannot be replicated by a hotel or an unfurnished apartment. Before settling into a home of their own, my non-primary residence acts as a place where a family can adapt to their new surroundings comfortably with the helping hand of their host.

I not only worry about the depletion of accommodation options for homelike stays for those seeking just that but also for the vacation renters who are not looking for the standard "hotel vacation" experience where some will surely miss out on what Winnipeg has to offer. I stated this at the last meeting I participated in but I certainly need to reiterate the many conversations with guests throughout the years where the difficulties in finding appropriate budget accommodations in Winnipeg was highlighted.

I understand and empathize with the frustrations of residents living in the Glasshouse who's building is mistreated by irresponsible short term guests and the hosts responsible. I certainly agree there needs to

be legislation in place to prevent that from happening again, but shutting down the entire industry is not the answer. By implementing regulations comparable to the “Toronto model” we would be punishing the masses for the faults of the few. Please consider this when making your decisions.

The licensing approach we are in favor of with restrictions such as limiting the percentage of units allowed to operate as short term rental in a condo building would surely be reasonable and fair. Residents could be protected by implementing regulations to keep hosts accountable by increasing security measures, enforcing fines if/ when problems arise. And with legislation ensuring the control stays in the hands of the residents and not the STR owners, there are also many things condos can do to protect their residents independently without penalizing hosts outside of this condo setting.

In regards to section A, subsection iii of the report which suggests an STR operator needs to…“Inform all immediate neighbors of the short term rental schedule for each new arrival and their stay duration”. In my opinion this is a tactic to take the focus of plausible solutions instead of dealing with certain people's immediate problems/ frustrations and finding ways of bogging down a system that works.

I support regulation that helps ensure guest safety including the business licensing approach similar to what the city of Calgary adopted with fair licensing fees and fire and safety regulations. These type of regulations can help discourage the dishonest hosts who people are worried about when protesting Airbnb and empower the ones who follow the rules. I assure you my neighbors feel comfortable and safe but I am open to doing what will make any STR neighbor feel the same way. I just ask that the same courtesy is reciprocated to myself and other STR operators in finding a middle ground.

I am not in agreement with restricting short term rentals to primary residence only as this does nothing to solve the issues discussed, it only hurts the industry and once again, the livelihood of responsible hosts like myself. Needless to say, Winnipeg does not resemble Toronto. Yet it has been brought into the conversation of Short Term Rentals in my opinion solely to halt the industry, not fairly regulate it, which is what our group of hosts has been asking from the beginning. What isn't fair is the notion that we should be copying our Canadian cities that have the lowest vacancy rates and highest cost of living. Those cities have been matched with the most stringent STR regulations in the country with reason. But that is certainly not what is needed here.

Being very enthusiastic about progressive Tourism planning myself, contributing to a 5% hospitality tax, is a welcomed opportunity for us hosts to contribute and also benefit from Winnipeg and Manitoba Tourism programs.

And as Winnipeg continues to put an emphasis on tourism, we should not regress away from what society is using as everyday “norms”. I know this has been a long and complex conversation but I think it’s clear there is certainly a place for a win/win situation where most importantly, people don’t have to lose their jobs.

I'm looking for your support on this matter.

Thank you

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Dominique Noel