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Personal information
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Delegation information
Committee: Standing Policy Committee on Property and Development, Heritage, and Downtown Development

Agenda item (number and title): Short Term Rental

Service inquiry: Submit Comments in writing
Participation preference: N/A
Comments in writing: First of all, I would like to thank the city council for your continued commitment to understand and regulate the impact of short-term rental in the community. I am writing once again to voice my support for strong STR regulations, in particular the primary residence rule and strict enforcement of it.

Myself, and other residents have already described in detail in the past how these STRs have negatively impacted our quality of life. We have had to deal with noise disturbances, violent incidents, false fire alarms, among other things, as a result of short-term renters in our building. Outside of our individual experiences, we have already also discussed negative STR impact to affordable housing stock, rent prices, make-up of the community and safety.
Creating bylaws that require that the STRs must be the primary residence of the owner will help alleviate some of the pain points described above. Many of the investors and absentee landlords that own these properties have no connection to the neighbourhood they operate in, and many do not even live in the city, the province or even Canada. Many act as though they have no accountability to ensure their neighbours are not negatively impacted by the activities of their renters. At its inception, STR platforms such as Airbnb touted itself as a way for homeowners to rent out a room, or their entire home temporarily while they are also away travelling, but more and more, it has become dominated by wealthy investors who own multiple properties. One of the speakers from the last council meeting has called people who go on vacation as "elite", and I found it laughable coming from someone who owns multiple properties. These absentee landlords are essentially running hotel/lodging operations in residentially zoned neighbourhoods. The speaker also talked about how some the STR owners are now starting to sell their properties in anticipation of these regulations. She also said that there were 17 (!) properties that went back into the market as a result. That's 17 houses that should have been available in the first place to Winnipeg residents wanting to own a home and set their roots in our community. That's 17 properties that could have gone to young families and young professionals whose permanent presence would add to the fabric of that community. We have all heard stories about bidding wars and house prices that are well beyond that budget of Winnipegers, and putting in a primary residence bylaw would help level that playing field. Imagine how many more properties will become available if these investors choose not to rent these long term? STR proponents also make it sound like that tourists will no longer come to Winnipeg if STR properties no longer exist, and that is simply not true, and it undermines the progress and effort that the province, city and entities such as Tourism Winnipeg have made to make our city worth visiting. We have many hotels in our city that can accommodate out of town guests. Hotels that employ hundreds of Winnipegers, pay taxes and follow regulations that STRs seem to be exempt from. The comment that STRs are somehow the answer to the refugee crisis or to racism that people experience in hotels is not based in fact and quite frankly a very insulting generalization to our hotel industry and the workers.

On top of adding the primary residency rule, I also think it is very important to make sure that rules are tight so that people don't get around it, and that they are strictly enforced and that anyone violating the rules are fined in a way that would prevent them from flouting the rules again. I don't think we can rely on the STR platforms to help us in this regard because all they care about is profit, and not the communities they operate in. STR platforms like Airbnb and VRBO are akin to locusts that swoop into a community, decimate it and leave when it no longer serves their purpose. They have no vested interest in our city nor in the people who live here. Countless other jurisdictions in Canada, the US and Europe have already learned and this lesson and have enacted primary residence rules. In the previous meeting, a speaker have said that cities are just "copying and pasting" legislation but that's really just a way of minimizing the negative impact of STRS have had on cities all over the Canada and the world, and implying that little thought have gone into these rules. I commend the city for putting the ordinary residents first and our community, and not the select few that profit off STRS. There needs to be licensing, registration, fees/taxes, safety regulations, and robust fines for violations, and I think we can look at the jurisdictions that have successfully enforced them as basis for ours. The fines need to be heavy enough so that there is no incentive for the continued bad behaviour of STRs. In a previous meeting, one of the owners have actually said that any fine or tax or fee that will be imposed on them will just be passed on to their customers, and we need to ensure that this is not the case. Some provinces are working alongside the cities and towns to ensure that legislation is introduced consistently and province-wide (for example, BC). Winnipeg residents need to be able to rely on the officials to enforce these rules because as residents, we don't have the resources to monitor and enforce them and we should not have suffer more quality of life issues if rules are put in place and not enforced.

I love Winnipeg and I think that our city is world-class. We are a working class city and part of what makes us tick is that we are diverse, we value community and we look after each other. I love living Downtown, and I think ensuring that STRs do not continue to negatively impact condominium residents will encourage people to come and live Downtown. I disagree with the speaker last time that said Downtown is a dangerous place. The few of us that permanently reside in our building have a good relationship and we all enjoy what our Downtown has to offer, and it can only get better. The city has already invested millions of dollars in this building with the objective of building density downtown, and by ensuring that only permanent residences can be rented out as STR units, then they can help ensure that investment pays off, show commitment to existing residents and continue revitalization efforts.

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