CRAIG PENNER

Over the last year, we've had a lot of discussion regarding short term rentals. I'm writing to express my observations and opinions in what is necessary to improve the safety and quality of life while residing in a downtown condo. Focus can't be just fair taxation with hotels. In a city like Winnipeg that leads the country in violent crime, the police/fire/ambulance resources are already stretched thin. The focus of regulation should be on neighbourhood safety. This should begin by regulating owner responsibility through only allowing short term rentals to homes/units where they are a primary resident.

In our building, short term rentals increase the risk of violent crime, property damage and bring crime such as drug and sex trafficking, create noise disruptions and decrease the quality of life. In regards to increased violence, police are regularly called to our building to deal with parties and assaults in these problem suites. We have had people running through our hallways with guns and knives. Bear mace has been used in our hallways and lobbies from drug deals gone bad. No-knock raids by the police tactical unit on certain problem floors at times has become the norm. Out of control parties have resulted in neighbours and employees being assaulted or in some cases items such as eggs, garbage bags full of water, knives and can openers have been thrown from balconies at building tenants or employees below. Neighbours have been terrorized by intoxicated partiers trying to force entry into units in the middle of the night attempting to enter what they believe is a short-term rental suite where they believe a party is occurring. Incidents at the Glasshouse were so bad last year that our security company pulled their contract due to unsafe working conditions for their employees as the short-term rental industry refused to address the safety concerns necessary to ensure the safety of our building employees.

Hotels have employees such as security guards and concierge employed at all times to address the concerns of all guests. They also have a list of guests and take responsibility for who enter the building. Short term rental owners have no incentive to respect the neighbours in the building as they do not make money off us. We however subsidize the repairs the damage their guests cause to the building through higher element fees. An apartment building would evict problem tenants in a building but the short-term rental owner, owns the suite and we never know who and when we will get new neighbours. Owners of problem suites also can only be fined a maximum of twelve ($100) fines in a calendar year under the Manitoba condo laws. Even the best-intentioned short-term rental suites evict the worst tenants the following morning while the neighbours have to deal with their behaviour all night.

When problems arise, the owner of the rental suite is not present to address them. They also do not come to the building to address these issues. They depend on the unpaid labour of neighbours or building employees to monitor suites and their conduct and if the issue is problematic enough, to take the first steps to address it. The short-term rental owners however do not pay for security and do not pay for Worker's Compensation if a building employee is assaulted or injured by one of their guests. Airbnb's own help line recommends contacting the police to deal with problem suites. This however is an abuse of police resources where the owner of the short-term rental suite should be present to be proactive with addressing risks and providing intervention with problems.

Airbnb themselves are reluctant to take responsibility as they require a specific online listing rather than an address before accepting a complaint. This is problematic in a building with a suspected over 70 short term rental suites. The owner can also delist at any time preventing neighbours from finding the listing.

Violent assaults have become the norm in our building with many of these assaults connected to the parties that occur in the suites. EMS is regularly dispatched to our building to treat the victims of these assaults or to for the drug overdoses that occur at these parties. A frequent problem at these parties is that when building employees try to get them under control or a guest is assaulted, the fire alarm is pulled. These events are not isolated but regular problems that can happen at all hours of the night and require a full EMS response and building evacuation. The fire alarm also disables our elevators requiring a building restart which can lock our neighbours with disabilities out of our building for hours, even after an evacuation that occurred in the middle of the night.

Our home itself, has called 911 six times on short term rental suites for violent incidents. Some people will dismiss this as downtown issues but we have spent most of our lives living in the downtown, West End and Central neighbourhoods and these issues have never been present in our previous homes and we have never called for police assistance until short term rental suites became our neighbours. The more suites present in a building or building floor, the issues and necessity for EMS assistance increases

The worst examples where we required police assistance include hearing a man yelling in French that he was going to murder his girlfriend while we could hear him horribly assault her in the STR suite across the hall. From the same 1-bedroom suite in a separate incident, we had a fight of six individuals in our hallway where they nearly crashed through the door to our suite at 3am. When looking out of our peephole, I could see a man in his underwear, with his hands over his head begging for his life. The police arrested people and the injured parties were taken to the hospital via ambulance, the STR property manager knew things were escalating hours before throughout the night and didn't bother to come to the building until 11am the next morning.

Some of the STR lobbyists will present stories regarding how they provided homes for Ukrainian refugees or places to live for front-line workers to live during the pandemic. I myself have friends and family directed by the conflict in Ukraine. My wife's family were refugees from war which some of their family members did not survive and the ones that did were scattered across Europe and North America. They lived in a refugee camp for 3 years before being accepted to Canada and moved into their first apartment near the U of W. My mother in-law upon arrival raised two children while becoming an immigration social worker, assisting refugees and their families in the downtown, West End neighbourhoods.

Nowhere in the settlement plan for refugees and their families does it depend on short-term rentals and especially with suites that do not require a primary resident. We have government agencies, not for profits and settlement programs created specifically to support refugees, finding homes and adjusting to the Canadian life. It is in poor taste to use the suffering people have experienced from war as a prop to sell their business model. Newcomers to this country require relationships within their community and a support network. This is specifically what the short-term rental is fighting as the primary resident requirement will prevent many of their businesses to be profitable. They do not want to have a relationship with their customer. Relationships are not

formed from looking through a doorbell camera or through online communication, which at best is the level of communication most STRs in our building operate.

It is also in poor taste to use these prop stories to sell that they are selling a safe place for refugee families while traumatizing and re-traumatizing my own family. Last year during the pandemic, the violence and disruptions on our floor and in our building were so frequent, my wife would sleep fully clothed in case we were required to flee our suite if somebody forcibly tried to enter or if the violence in the STRs made her feel too unsafe to remain home.

Short-term renters also bring increased risk of theft to the building and the neighbouring suites. I was the victim of a break and enter last year where a short-term rental key fob was used by criminals to enter and re-enter the building. I was fortunate to be victim of a B and E once in our building. Other people in our building have been victimized multiple times because of short term rentals providing unlimited access into the building to thieves. Lockboxes can be stolen and broken into. By just buzzing someone into a building remotely over the phone, you are allowing anyone into the building without validation. Using a door cam at your suite is also not sufficient as you've already let a party into the building without validation remotely. It also does not ensure how many guests are coming into the building beyond check in. This is especially problematic with party suites, drug dealing suites and the sex trafficking that occurs in short term rentals. Partiers, johns and individuals purchasing drugs, do not all arrive at check in time.

The allure of short-term rental units for criminal activities such as whether to flout public health laws for a COVID party, sex workers, human trafficking or drug dealing is that short term rental suites or companies do not have employees on site to monitor and intervene in their problematic activities. Information is not available to the police and it is easy for criminals to rent multiple suites in a large building such as ours.

The Sex Workers Action Coalition in a May 16th, 2022 CTV news story is quoted as "Sex workers use rentals as a safer place to see clients." Everyone deserves to be able to live and work in a safe environment. The issue is the danger that is brought to our hallways, doorsteps and community. This is especially problematic as drug dealers and sex traffickers may operate out of different suites every couple of days before switching suites in the building. Guests or renters in these suites have threatened, sexually harassed on in some cases assaulted family members and building employees.

With more organized crime, you may see a gang with body armour working out of a suite while business is conducted out of another. The same thing occurs with sex workers where multiple girls may remain in one suite while the John customers enter a 2nd or 3rd suite where the transaction occurs. Last October we had an out-of-town individual that was lured online for a party at a short-term rental suite in our building where he was then kidnapped and removed to a different short-term rental to be tortured for days for the purpose of extortion. These suites for the most part would not be used for these criminal purposes if the primary resident was required to monitor their business investment.

If a short-term rental suite with no on-site supervision only discovers about a party occurring because of complaints from their neighbours, how can we trust them when criminals and organized crime utilizes their suites in our building right at our doorsteps? Some short-term rental lobbyists

will deny it exists, but this is more out of self preservation than from actual knowledge of what is taking place in their suites.

Short term rental owners will argue they revitalize communities. I disagree. Property values have decreased in our building steadily as the amount of short-term rental units increase. This is even during a time of a real estate boom. Neighbours with other options avoid coming home to avoid the risks associated with their suites. Many of my former neighbours have sold for large losses as the regular intrusions caused by short term rentals at times to can be unbearable. One retiree recently sold his suite for a $70 thousand loss as he felt he could not wait any longer for the government to take action. Owners who rented to long term rental suites struggle to renew annual leases as apartment buildings that do not allow short term rentals provide safer environments with less disruptions. Owners who rented to doctors, bankers and professional hockey players have their condos empty as leases were not renewed due to regular overnight disruptions.

Last week City Hall heard a presentation from Tower's Reality requesting permission for a Polo Park development for condos as the city currently has a 5% vacancy rate. Their presentation said it was essential for Winnipeg's growth to present living options for long term tenants. Tower's Reality is not the developer but the managing company for the Glasshouse building where over 1/3rd of our suites are confirmed STRs and our owner/occupied suites have steadily decreased to where they are currently at 25%. This while according to a October 17, 2016 CBC news story, Urban Capital received $5.7 million in government grants to stimulate resident housing by building the Glasshouse. For these grants to be used to subsidize direct competition with hotels while playing under different rules is not appropriate and defeats the purpose that the grants were provided for in the first place. If the city has a housing shortage, what would the vacancy rate be if these STRs being operated as ghost hotels/illegal rooming houses were suddenly added to the housing/rental market?

Without regulation that requires short term rentals to exist only within a primary residence, our downtown will never get the grocery store it drastically needs if the people invested in living in this community are displaced by short term rentals with no investment in our community or people that reside in it. People living downtown is why city hall and the Manitoba government provided grants to developments like the Glasshouse in the first place. Some people may dismiss our concerns being that we live downtown. Our community deserves the same safety and assurances that any other neighbourhood would enjoy. We should however not have to sacrifice our safety to provide unlicensed rooming houses that compete with the hotel industry. We are a middleclass family and we should not be forced out of our only home so that an investor with no ties to our community can own or manage 2, 3 or in some cases, 18 or more homes. Please consider this when considering regulating short term rentals and keeping the primary resident requirement.