I came to Canada in March of 1991, as a single mom of three children. I am proud to say two of them are now University graduates.

I have worked hard since my arrival in this country because as a single mom I didn't want to depend on the system. I took training to better myself so I could educate and feed my children.

When my two grown up daughters went away to University, my then 10 year old son started feeling lonely missing his sisters. He me to adopt a child, something I certainly couldn't afford. So I decided to volunteer with UofM to host students which was fun.

Then I applied to be a Homestay Mom. The Homestay coordinator came to approve my home. It was easily approved by them. I continued to do this until the pandemic hit.

During these difficult times the Winnipeg hosts have been a great support in providing temporary housing to newcomers and international students while they wait for a permanent residency.

While our guests were in quarantine, we were devoted to support them by buying their food, cleaning and providing all they need to prevent them having to go out or to expose others.

It's hard but rewarding work. We have to share our privacy at our home. We pay extra for water, heat, A/C, wifi, laundry to provide all of the amenities. We furnish the room with bedding and supplies at our own expense. Our service is centred around
"caring and sharing" and is highly sought after.

We don't make a lot of money, but we enjoy having international students who come to settle in Winnipeg. The students are attracted to Winnipeg because their lifestyle here is more affordable. My business is a big part of that.

I think Winnipeg needs more population, more workers, more families. Winnipeg isn't at all like Toronto or Vancouver. How much does a property cost here and how much it's in Vancouver or Toronto? It's already affordable! This is why they choose to land in Winnipeg.

As a temporary home, most of the students and newcomers still need my help even after they have left my TEMPORARY home. I remain their contact for local tips and advice. I have found furniture or anything that I can get to donate to them for their new permanent homes.

Many come to study and later to became permanent residents of Winnipeg after finishing university. It's expensive to become a Permanent Resident so my business helps them to cut a corner somewhere.

Our clients bring in their money from other countries to help our economy, our society, they invest into Winnipeg personally, professionally and economically.

Having a place like mine to land is a huge relief for them. Our home is a home away from home and at the same time, it helps us to pay our own bills and be productive citizens of Winnipeg.

This model works well for a family of empty nesters, a mother who is on maternity leave getting only 60% of their salary or someone who cannot work full time while taking care of their kids.

The rich don’t have to share their home but we depend on it. My property taxes have already increased and will increase again next year, I already got the Assessment and taxation Department letter telling me this. We are already paying $469 per month in property tax, how much will it be next year? I don’t think I can afford anymore without renting our spare rooms year round…not 180 days or whatever council decides is fit.

Even though water, hydro, property taxes have all increased, Airbnb is now charging Occupancy taxes. Then there are the fees paid by the host and the guests. Who is making more money? At least the city council could see it in their heart to let us keep this one thing to offset some of our rising costs. What is left for us after all expenses incurred if you add all of the accommodation taxes I heard the City Council is planning?

With the new regulations council is trying to apply, the City of Winnipeg is taking away affordable housing options like mine. I am afraid that our City won’t be attractive to newcomers like I once was anymore.

Our service that supports our family is also humanitarian in nature. Our heart, our love, our passion is to host newcomers, students and temporary workers while waiting for a permanent home. I wish I could have used a service like this when I arrived here so long ago.

Why is my City Council wasting their time with us? It is the construction companies who are busy building towers not homes and selling them for such expensive price that are the main issue in affordability. They buy regular sized lots and split them up to four tiny homes. These are the companies changing our neighborhood. Please go after them and change their plans to create more affordable housing.

My neighbors don’t complain about my guests. They do complain about in-fill houses and apartment blocks changing our community. They are doing same style of construction here as they do in Vancouver, which is not appropriate here. Neither are rules for short term rentals adapted from these larger cities like Toronto and Vancouver.

I am retired now and my husband is too. He had to work for many years after his retirement age so we could afford to paid our taxes, our utilities and living expenses. If we can not do our short term rentals at full capacity any longer, God knows what will happen to us. Especially now that cost of living is increasing. This is not a hobby for us, it’s survival.

Ruth Cardona
Fort Rouge