The Cultural and Economic Benefits of Short-Term Rentals in Winnipeg.

As responsible business owners and professionals our position as short-term rental owners are to continue to work with council to come up with a solution that works for everyone. The success of the programs put in place by Regina and Calgary proves that it can be done.

However, we feel that over-reaching policies like the Toronto model are merely knee jerk reactions to a set of perceived problems that did not yield the intended results. Their intent in the East was to make housing more affordable and accessible. It did not do that. The average rents in Toronto have actually increased 6.7% in the time since the by-laws came into effect in January of 2021.

Winnipeg hosts are in favour of incorporating some fire and safety regulations, so long as they don't exceed what would be expected of an average residential home.

We have an issue with just two of the items mentioned in the report. The primary residence only requirement and capping the number of days a home can be rented. They not only knock out nearly all of the people who really depend on this income, but they decrease the available housing supply. Working contrary to any affordability or accessibility goals.

Short term rentals are an integral part of the overall housing solution in Winnipeg. They have been used as temporary accommodation for families displaced by home insurance claims or those who have planned major home renovations. They are used for newcomers until they find permanent housing.

I am currently staying in one of my own short-term rentals while my primary residence is being prepped for sale. It will be our temporary address until we find another permanent home to purchase. These in-between houses short stay is a common request from guests right now.

There are only a few hundred short-term rental listings in Winnipeg, but please note each listing employs on average two cleaning staff to run it. If each of the 700 some odd listings are multiplied by at least two employees, that equates to 1400 to 1500 people. I have not yet added in any building or property maintenance staff yet. Then of course there's property managers, owners and co-hosts. So, it could be over TWO THOUSAND Winnipeggers currently employed by this industry.

These two contentious items, if implemented, would not only cause the loss of a substantial amount of local employment. It would take away a fantastic cultural learning experience for Winnipeg communities and omit a much-needed tax and retail sales revenue generator.

Does the city have the financial means to manage any new by-laws on this topic without including the licensing income from the non-primary residence listings and the accommodation taxes from these higher dollar-value rentals?

I have said before, guest consumer spending goes directly into our economy. They average $200 per guest, per day. My own three suites bring approximately $960,000 dollars of guest spending per annum into Winnipeg businesses. If that sounds like a hefty number, imagine what the visitors to all of the other local listings are bringing in as a grand total. Just add some zeros to the figure I gave.

To illustrate this for a moment. Recently six of my guests went over to 529 Wellington and told me they ran up a four digit bill over there.
Earlier that day they took their three grandchildren, who live here locally, out to our Assiniboine Park Zoo. They all came back with t-shirts and stuffed zoo animal souvenirs, they stopped for lunch and ice cream on the way back too…so cha-ching!

This family was so grateful to be able to gather from different areas of Canada all together in one of my houses. They barbecued on my deck a few times. They played in the yard with toddler grandchildren whom they had never had the chance to meet before. They told me they will be back often and thanked me profusely for providing this style of service.

A submission from one the last planning committee meetings suggested that pushing a longer stay requirement in short-term rentals FORCES people to stay in a hotel.

I have to reiterate, sales and marketing is never about forcing clients to do what you want. It is about offering the right selections to meet their needs. A rigid stance of “this is how we have always done it” won’t work in this constantly evolving retail climate.

Not including the secondary residence STR’s in the regulations going forward, would mean all we’ve accomplished here after so much debate is to possibly gain 5% of some $50 - $100 per night stays in somebody’s spare bedroom.

I know that the slight alteration in the report language to say “shall include” primary residence only, or the direct reference to the Toronto model does not actually indicate anything at all in the eventual outcome of this debate.

However, this did create a false illusion for the people watching from both sides, as well as confuse the local media. For that reason, I felt this tactic was an unprofessional action at this juncture and undermines the public engagement process.

I still firmly believe that most of council and the planning department will look objectively at both sides of this equation regardless of how negatively the survey was worded.

Worst case scenario, can you not just grandfather in the existing short-term rentals so the people who have already made heavy investments into Winnipeg are safe? (That one is my own suggestion, not necessarily the opinion of local STR owners).

Please acknowledge that many of the negative stories swirling around this enterprise are anecdotal in nature. They don’t happen to match up at all with the hard data available from the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service.

I caution council to obtain real emergency call data before letting the emotions and agenda of a few citizens (concentrated primarily in only one building) carry this much weight in your decisions that impact so many.

It is my own belief that the concerns a few residents have put forward on items like traffic, noise, density, trash and parking are actually dog whistle items aimed at keeping specific groups out of their communities.

I have listened to presenters say STR is responsible for housing depreciation, also responsible for housing not being affordable enough, responsible for homelessness, responsible for the crime rate in Winnipeg … I feel like STR has become a convenient scapegoat to blame for nearly anything.

Short-term rentals do not remove affordable housing options. There is a 13.7% vacancy rate in suites renting for $1800 - $2000 a month and up (when used as long term unfurnished). The majority of the Airbnb listings in Winnipeg fall into this category. Take a look at current listings on the site.

Another note: Fairbnb…is just another competitor in the rental market. No different than the new fancy mixed use building going up in Waverley West.

I would like to remind everyone involved that this process is supposed to be a merger, not a hostile take over.

You have heard from local groups who place new immigrants in temporary housing and rely on short term rentals. You have heard from the cleaning and maintenance staff - the real backbone of this industry. You have seen several submissions from neighbours who have no issues with a short-term rental next door. You have seen glowing reviews from guests.

We submitted an email from Regina's city council indicating that over a year into their regulation program things are going well. No changes to it are planned. Regina is confident in it's fair and common-sense regulations. Winnipeg should take direction from Regina rather than try to cut a swath right through an entire industry.

Council, if you vote for the primary residence only aspect of this report, you are basically voting for a backdoor expropriation of these businesses without compensation!

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