

January 26, 2025

Anthony Lacolla.
Land Use Services Division Chief
City of Alexandria, Virginia
Department of Planning and Zoning

Dear Sir,

I am writing to express my concerns with the proposed regulation governing Short-Term Residential Rental (STRR) properties in the City of Alexandria. My comments provided during the initial survey process were apparently unconvincing. While I greatly appreciate the intent to rid the City of so-called “party houses” that impinge on certain neighborhoods, the regulation as worded constitutes an overreach with unintended consequences for small business owners operating ethically, legally and providing quality services to the community.

Duvall House is commercially zoned and is sited on a commercial block - the 300 block of Cameron Street across from City Hall.

Duvall House was first established in 1783 as Duvall’s Tavern and famously hosted General George Washington on New Year’s Eve 1783 celebrating his triumphant return from the Revolutionary War. Ironically, under the proposed regulations, this fete hosted by a “grateful nation” would not have been allowed.

At many points in its storied history, Duvall House was available commercially as an event space, including when it was home to El Alcaraz Antiques & Fine Arts from 1998 - 2000. At that time, it was advertised as “accommodating 65 seated and up to 120 for a standing buffet”.

Duvall House is quite spacious at over 4,000 sq-ft and features a 450 sq-ft ballroom on the second floor.

For the past 8 years, Duvall House has quite successfully been operated as a short-term rental, available through both the AirBnB and VRBO platforms and has amassed 130 reviews, 100% five stars to date. Approximately one third of Duvall House’s guests host some form of event which would otherwise violate the proposed regulations by exceeding the maximum occupancy of 10. In the eight years that Duvall House has operated and hosted events, we have had exactly zero

complaints from neighbors or other concerned citizens of Alexandria for excessive noise or for any other reason.

Examples of the events hosted at Duvall House include:

- the annual fundraiser for the George Washington Birthday Celebration Committee
- the 250th anniversary of the Fairfax Resolves
- an annual open-house brunch for wreath layers volunteering for the Wreaths Across America event at Arlington Cemetery
- a retirement celebration for a decorated US Army Colonel
- innumerable small weddings, rehearsal dinners, bridal and baby showers, graduation parties, reunions, and business meetings

Alexandria is lacking in intimate, historic event space and Duvall House's business model effectively addresses that market void.

The owner lives within 3 blocks of Duvall House and is available 24x7 to address any guest or neighbor concerns with the property in real-time.

Solutions to this problem could include the proposed regulation applying exclusively to Residential properties. The actual proposal speaks of Short Term **Residential** Rental regulations. (Emphasis added).

It seems clear that there was an intention to address residential versus commercial rentals. To simply waive in commercial would effectively make this Short Term Rental. There are many good reasons to treat these two types of ownership and operation differently. The proposed regulations restrict use and devalue this commercial property.

Moreover, guests and visitors to Duvall House spend considerable amounts of money going to bars, dining out, buying clothes, art, etc., in addition to the occupancy taxes paid directly to the city.

Another line of thought is to amend the regulation to address the real perceived problem: rentals of residential properties in traditionally quiet neighborhoods. The reasonable expectation of quiet and privacy is very different there than it is in downtown Old Town. The city should identify zones - as they do for parking, etc. and set different rules accordingly.

Alternatively, and as a last resort, a process should be created to grant exceptions to the proposed regulations for corner case properties such as Duvall House.

I appreciate your attention and consideration of this appeal.

Chris Marzilli
Owner/Operator of Duvall House at 305 Cameron Street

cc:

Gloria Sitton
City Clerk and Clerk of Council

Mayor Alvia Gaskins

Christine Macey
Assistant to Mayor Alvia Gaskins