

Statement to Alexandria City Council Regarding Short Term Rentals
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Greetings and congratulations on your recent election to City Council. Nine years ago, using the short-term rental model, my late husband and I became hosts through AirBnB. I am rated a "Super Host" by the company due to the excellent client experiences I provide. I am a resident and property owner in the City of Alexandria and have lived in my home for 40 years. The income I receive from my short-term rentals allows me to remain in my Alexandria home, so this issue is very important to me, and I welcome the opportunity to speak to you about it.

The City of Alexandria has welcomed AirBnB for a number of years ~~and there are over 5,000 hosts in our area~~. A host must be gracious and provide a pleasant environment in order to have repeat bookings. Any complaints and AirBnb has the ability to drop them as a host. A good number of my guests book every month and even months ahead. I do not speak for AirBnb. It is *my experience* I am here to address.

Guests are rated by hosts and if they get negative reviews from a host, AirBnB will prohibit them from their service. Additionally, if a host gets negative reviews, AirBnb can drop them from the service. SO there is already regulation on that end.

I am here today to speak for myself. I am not an absentee owner. I live on the premises. I do not live in another state or country renting out a space from afar. I meet all my guests when they arrive at my home. They are provided with one guest room. Just to be clear, I do not go away and give them the entire house.

575 At the beginning, in the discussion about short-term rentals, the City agreed that complaints could be handled by existing laws about noise, trash and parking. This recent consideration to make short-term rentals illegal is **overreach** by the City and stifles the ability for homeowners to conduct this legitimate business inside their homes. Should a few irresponsible short-term rentals out of ~~5,000~~ affect a profitable enterprise for both the homeowner and the City? I read the complaints section of your report and see no figures provided on how many other residents who do not have short-term rentals, are registering complaints about the same issues. I'm not standing up for these rentals, no one wants to live next door to a "party house", I'm just curious how often the City receives noise, trash and parking complaints from residents who do not have a short-term rental next door.

With the sudden firings and shutdowns within the Federal government, I have to wonder - shouldn't the City turn its focus to consider how many residents are losing their jobs or need to move away from the city? And how many office spaces will be empty of daily workers who spend their shopping and dining out money in the city? Even if these

residents were to remain in the city they will worry about spending since many will be on unemployment – at least in the short term. Thousands will be jockeying for the same positions - meaning opportunities for quick employment will be limited. This translates into a loss of revenue for local businesses and services. With an \$80M shortfall the City might consider the importance of tourism to bolster the local economy and additionally, the collection of taxes and fees. As a short-term rental provider, I feel I am supporting these revenue streams. So, I have to ask, is this really the time to enact prohibitions on residents who are bringing revenue and visitors to the city?

How AirBnb Works and Typical AirBnB Guests

In the 40 years I have lived in my Old Town home, I have never had a complaint from neighbors about noise or a disturbance of any kind. Most of the guests who book with me own their homes whether in the U. S. or abroad. Many are married with spouses and children at home. Guests often comment that they enjoy having a quiet house in which to recharge. They are grateful for the safe and quiet surroundings so that they can concentrate on their busy schedules and activities outside of the house. In my listing on AirBnB it specifically states that my home is owner-occupied. AirBnb requires this notice be provided in the listing to potential guests.

Some guests are here to enjoy the attractions, restaurants and shopping that historic Alexandria has to offer. Others are here to visit new grandchildren, search for a house or apartment as a result of a work-related relocation. Since I live onsite, I can interact with my guests – asking them why they are here, what they'd like to see and where they'd like to dine. My guests are here with a purpose. They are not here to hang around the house or party. They are up and out early in the morning and retire early. I am always onsite to greet guests when they arrive, and at home while they are visiting. I am not an absentee homeowner. I live in my home year-round. If I need to go out of town, I block off those dates for hosting a guest. I am pleased to report that many guests have stayed in touch with me regularly and some have become personal friends.

A typical guest is a professional – doctors, scientists, military, diplomats, businessmen and businesswomen have stayed here. Some have stayed for a year or more (especially those on government contracts and some are short-term stays, here for business meetings, conventions, large conferences, local events, compulsory monthly visits to their company's HQ, or for military or government meetings. One guest was the CEO of a large company based in Alexandria. He stayed here every month for five days at a time to train his replacement. Another was awaiting his State Department clearance so he could assume his post as Naval Attaché to Japan where he now resides. Others are here for meetings at the National Science Foundation, US Patent and Trademark Office or the many associations here in Old Town.

I have also hosted quite a number of new grandparents whose children live here but do not have enough space to accommodate them. Several of those guests book months in advance

and one grandmother visits every two months to help with the grandchildren who live in Old Town. Many of the guests I have hosted are looking for houses to buy or places to rent after being transferred to this area. They spend much of their visit with a local realtor.

Because I own two designated parking spaces, I can always provide parking for guests. I have an Alexandria City permit sticker to park behind my house on South Henry Street, so my spaces are always available for guests. Most AirBnB guests come by plane or train and follow up with public transportation like Metro or Uber. If they have driven, they rarely use their cars while they are here. They like that my home is within walking distance of all the sites, shops, events and restaurants. They are here for the Alexandria experience.

Encouraging Guests to Enjoy Our City

I keep current guidebooks and maps in the room and ask guests what their plans are during their stay. As a resident of the city, I suggest places to dine, unique shops, the Arts scene and local attractions and I always tell them about the free trolley!

Insurance Protection

AirBnB provides \$1M in insurance for any property damage or theft occurring from a visitor.

Complaints

There are already laws in place to address noise and trash. If there are complaints from neighbors, the police have the ability to cite, fine, apply court costs or jail time. This remediation is already in place and should be applied to those who violate these laws.

Home Business

I am licensed as an LLC in the Commonwealth of Virginia and pay all required State taxes, Alexandria taxes and fees as well as Federal taxes. I comply with every state, city and Federal requirements.

Summation

Along with hosting visiting friends and family, I have loved living here for the past 40 years. Furthermore, I look forward to meeting and entertaining new guests from around the country and around the world. Our area draws the most interesting people and, as a food and travel writer and theater critic, I am delighted to share insider tips on the best restaurants, historic sites, local businesses and fun local events while offering my guests a lovely space to rest and rejuvenate. My hope is that the rules on short-term rentals continue

as they have been and that the very few bad apples are reported and shut down so that they do not harm the experiences so many have enjoyed through a short-term rental.