

Aven, Heather M.

From: Keri Bean <keri.bean@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 19, 2018 11:11 AM
To: Grp.PL.Planning And Development Commission
Subject: STR Ordinance

Re: STR Ordinance
June 18, 2018

Dear Planning Commission,

I would like to express my support of regulated short-term rentals in the city of Bellingham. I believe that STRs are a terrific way to meet the many needs of our wonderful city: providing unique and local housing for travelers, incentivizing opportunity for much needed income for Bellingham residents, and expanding the benefits of diversity to our many neighborhoods.

While working for a nonprofit school serving at-risk youth, I struggled to make ends meet. The STR market allowed me to continue my work with non-profits and own a home. I am a world traveler, and I have taught and lived overseas. Whether staying in “casa particulares” in Cuba or in “pensions” in Greece I know that the opportunity to stay with local people provides an enriching experience, puts dollars into their communities, and facilitates cultural exchange.

The list of reasons why some travelers prefer STR's is long. Here is just one example. We had a single mother & young daughter who came to get their service dog from Brigadoon. Brigadoon trains service dogs in order to give independence to children, adults, and veterans. They needed a place to stay for two weeks where they could bond with the service dog and take part in the two week training. They were also in need of a yard to carry out training sessions. An STR was the ideal place for the needs of this family.

STR's also build bridges between our community and the world. We hosted Sylvia McAdam, a First Nations activist, who spoke about First Nations and environmental rights. We have hosted students from across the nation who took part in a program at WWU studying family planning in Rwanda. They stayed with us for three weeks and then traveled to Rwanda and returned for two more weeks. These students represented a diverse group of Americans (African, Indian, Asian, & Caucasians were represented). This kind of sharing of different perspectives enriches our community.

There are other ways in which STR's support our community. Here is a quote from one of our repeat guests:

“I live in Vancouver, BC and I used to get out of town frequently with trips to Seattle. Although I still love visiting Seattle, over the last couple of years I have discovered weekends in Bellingham offer much of the things I love about Seattle but with the charm and peacefulness of a much smaller place. And when I am back home and daydreaming about my next visit to Bellingham, the thought that pulls at me the most is returning to this lovely, cozy and thoroughly relaxing STR. I have never stayed at a more satisfying and lovingly looked after accommodation.”

This is just one guest who repeatedly comes to Bellingham (on bike, I might add), and spends dollars at local establishments. STR's like ours keep guests coming back to Bellingham time and time again.

Our neighbors support us too. Many of the houses in our neighborhood are too small to host family and friends. Almost every neighbor on our block has used our STR to host their guests.

I believe in thoughtful realistic regulation of STR's in Bellingham. While I support limiting STR's to two per owner, I do not support the 90 day limit. I believe that this will reduce the quality of STR's. There are many STR's in our community and the ones that provide the best experiences stay busy. There is a professional quality which evokes super-host status. These are hosts who go above and beyond in personalizing the STR experience.

I also believe that opening an STR should not necessitate a conditional use permit. This process will discourage this creative and beneficial micro-economy. Effective regulation will strike a balance between those who need alternative ways to make ends meet, while limiting the impact of STR's on the housing market.

Thank you for your consideration.

Keri Bean

Aven, Heather M.

From: Matt Atkins <matt.atkins@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 19, 2018 11:58 AM
To: MY - mayorsoffice@cob.org; CC - Shared Department; commission@cob.org;
Grp.PL.Planning And Development Commission
Subject: STR's and AirBnB

Dear Mayor, City Council and Planners,

I am writing to express my hope that you will NOT require CUP for AirBnB owners who are also residents of their STR. Personally, as a businessman, I understand the concern regarding those that are purchasing properties for the purpose of STR vs. long term rental, but that is a different situation from many of us who have 1-2 rooms as part of or adjacent to our primary residence.

A few thoughts:

- I have heard concern over lost revenue by hotels/motels due to STR's. My question is, "which hotels/motels?" Of course the only answer is, "the ones that exist today". The logic of this would preclude an future hotels/motels being allowed in town as well, as they will naturally compete for business. Anyone in the hospitality business will tell you that the more beds you have available, the larger the events you can host.
- I have heard, "STR's take away long term rental opportunities in a very tight rental market." Again, I understand some people think this is very clear, however, it doesn't apply to every situation and may not be factual at all. Do hotels/motels take away from long term rentals or do they provide a short term option while people seek to find suitable housing? Limiting the amount of hotels, though maybe good from a city planning standpoint, does nothing to increase the vacancy rate. Limiting STR's is not going to change the price of the rental/RE market in Whatcom County nor increase the available rentals accept by a very slight %.
 - I read in your minutes that there were over 300 listings on AirBnB in Bellingham. If 50% of those are "whole house", we are talking the potential of ~150 new long term rental properties on the market, if the property owners decided to use it that way.
 - Tell me how much that is going to move the needle in Bellingham? If there are ~3000 rental units in Bellingham (which is a rough estimate based on the latest figures I could find from 2014), with a current vacancy rate of <1%, putting 150 new options on the market is going to change the vacancy rate by about .3%. So instead of having .7% vacancy, we might make it to 1%.
 - Secondly, it is going to reduce the short term options which will drive up prices for those rentals.

I could go on and on, but for the sake of brevity, I will only address those two issues for now. I know you have heard from other AirBnB owners about the benefits to our local economy, the benefit of making home ownership more doable in a very tight market, the cost savings over hotels if you only want one room (in our case avg. \$60/night vs. avg. \$100+ at a hotel/motel). The benefits to a community by having multiple options for short term stays, Etc...

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I hope you will seriously consider a policy that allows those of us who use a small portion of our primary residence for STR's, to continue to do so without a CUP and without a 90 day/year restriction.

Sincerely,

--

Matthew Atkins

Senior Financial Advisor, Clearbrook Investment Management, LLC

Independent Life, Disability, LTC and Annuity Representative

360.815.1910

Home Address:

2924 Saint Clair St.

Bellingham, WA 98226

Aven, Heather M.

From: Pool, Lisa A.
Sent: Tuesday, June 19, 2018 12:48 PM
To: Aven, Heather M.
Cc: Nabbefeld, Kurt D.; Sepler, Rick M.
Subject: FW: Comments on Short-Term Rental Regulations

Heather - Please post.

Thanks,
Lisa

Lisa Pool, AICP
Senior Planner
City of Bellingham, WA
360-778-8390
lapool@cob.org

My incoming and outgoing email messages are subject to public disclosure requirements per RCW 42.56.

From: Scott Moore [mailto:sam13@q.com]
Sent: Tuesday, June 19, 2018 10:37 AM
To: Pool, Lisa A. <lapool@cob.org>
Subject: Comments on Short-Term Rental Regulations

Dear Ms. Pool, June 19, 2018

I attended the Council meeting last night primarily to listen to the discussion on the establishment of the City's Short-Term Rental Regulation consideration. While I'm not currently utilizing Short-Term renters my home is nicely set up to make such accommodation and I'd like to see it become an option. I'm retired and the extra income would be very helpful in order to live in an ever increasing expensive city. Following are my comments:

I took a look at the Portland STR model and there is much I like as opposed to the Seattle model. I tend to favor the Major's proposal.

- Have a different category for those wishing to rent-out a room(s) in their primary home of residence to those wanting to rent out a whole home rental. It seems those wanting to rent out a whole home would fall in a completely different type of rental category with a different set of regulations/requirements. Following are some proposals I'd like to be considered for those wanting to rent out a room(s) in their primary residence/where they reside:

- The 90 days being proposed by city staff I believe is too short and believe there should be no limits over the course of a year with some restrictions on length of stay as follows:

~ Each stay by a guest(s) to be no more than 14-days and cannot be extended. The idea being STR's would not become long-term rentals, which would be regulated in a separated category or approach with a conditional use permit being required.

- For all STR's a city permit would be required that spells out how fees or taxes would be collected by the city (to my understanding companies like AirBnB already automatically does this service).

~ Fees to acquire a city permit for an STR would be prorated on the type of STR - for instance, simply renting out a room in a persons home would be less as opposed to a full home rental as there is a difference with how income is derived - with a home owner renting out a room in their home it's more about supplementing income whereas renting out a whole home is more about a business operation.

- Compliance by the city could be done annually with a letter sent to STR owners to provide renter stay data (the type of data to be submitted to determined via city staff). Complaints by neighbors, renters, or police may require city staff to conduct a visit and/or to require the STR person to meet with city staff to review complaints and if their permit is being followed. If in non-compliant of the permit or there is repeated violations or complaints the permit to be revoked and the STR terminated until compliance may be confirmed.

Thanks for the good presentation last night and all the work that has been done to help navigate the STR world in the city.

--

Scott 
Sam13@Q.com

Aven, Heather M.

From: Pool, Lisa A.
Sent: Wednesday, June 20, 2018 10:35 AM
To: Aven, Heather M.
Cc: Nabbefeld, Kurt D.; Sepler, Rick M.
Subject: FW: Vacation rental ordinance

Heather - Please post. Thanks.

Lisa Pool, AICP
Senior Planner
City of Bellingham, WA
360-778-8390
lapool@cob.org

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From: Richard Conoboy [mailto:riton@comcast.net]
Sent: Wednesday, June 20, 2018 10:32 AM
To: Bornemann, Terry R. <tbornemann@cob.org>; Knutson, Gene R. <gknutson@cob.org>; Lilliquist, Michael W. <mlilliquist@cob.org>; Hammill, Daniel C. <dchammill@cob.org>; Vargas, Pinky T. <ptmvargas@cob.org>; Barker, April <abarker@cob.org>; Murphy, Roxanne J. <rjmurphy@cob.org>
Cc: Pool, Lisa A. <lapool@cob.org>; Marchand, Marie M. <mmarchand@cob.org>; Gardner, Mark J. <mgardner@cob.org>
Subject: Vacation rental ordinance

Council Members,

Many of the supporters of the notion of vacation rentals, especially those who came forward at the 18 June hearing before council, spoke to their personal experiences as owners of vacation rentals. First, it boggles one's mind that so many property owners actually speak before council to admit openly they have been violating Bellingham's laws that prohibit such rentals and at the same time plead to the council that they be able to continue as before with an ordinance that would legalize their present scofflaw behavior. Their sense of entitlement is appalling. The phrase "unmitigated gall" comes to mind.

Their testimony of personal experience is entirely anecdotal and self-serving. Claims that this city should have a vacation rental ordinance that assists homeowners in remaining in their homes by providing additional income are unverified. Over 300 vacation rentals operate illegally within the city limits, however, nobody has a scintilla of direct evidence that any are used to support families who might otherwise be on the street or renting. The fact is we have no idea who these property owners are, their reason for renting to vacationers (rather than locals) or the number of rentals per property owner or corporation.

Without a total inventory of these vacation dwellings (to include names of each party – corporate or otherwise), we have no idea what we are talking about and have no way to evaluate the claims of those who come forward pleading economic necessity or the extent of problems regarding the geographical concentration of units, absentee ownership or business ownership solely for profit.

The council should return to square one by rejecting the planning commission's ill-advised draft ordinance. A moratorium on vacation rentals should be declared immediately (yes - shut them down) while a serious city-wide

discussion is carried out regarding the advisability of allowing the commercialization of neighborhoods and the use of our housing stock for transients rather than our own citizens.

Regards,

Dick Conoboy
Bellingham WA

Aven, Heather M.

From: Pool, Lisa A.
Sent: Friday, June 22, 2018 9:48 AM
To: Aven, Heather M.
Cc: Nabbefeld, Kurt D.; Sepler, Rick M.
Subject: FW: short term rentals

Heather -

Please post.

Thanks,
Lisa

Lisa Pool, AICP
Senior Planner
City of Bellingham, WA
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lapool@cob.org

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From: Henry and Mickey [mailto:rojoyeti@gmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, June 21, 2018 9:21 PM
To: Pool, Lisa A. <lapool@cob.org>; CC - Shared Department <cc@cob.org>
Subject: short term rentals

I just watched the city council mtg in regards to STRs being approved throughout Bellingham as I was unable to attend this mtg.

I think this is a HUGE decision and may change Bellingham significantly and irrevocably, from a community into a city massed by those wanting to use Bellingham as their playground, or cash cow. Yes, we want to build income for local businesses. By promoting sustainable growth and production. Are STRs sustainable? We want a majority of population to be LONG TERM RESIDENTS right? Are we going to limit how many STRs are appropriate for the population. I urge some careful examination to be done on how this changes a small city.

I hear Seattle and Portland "model" being used as examples, but those are big cities. How they are impacted is different than it is for Bellingham. I'm sure a lot of the STRs are in the core of business areas within the city, not in every pocket of residential housing. Type 1, renting space in your primary residence, those might be acceptable in Bellingham. Maybe a good first step, see how it goes. Wait a year or so, see with the DADUs and STRs (that's a big addition), how things go. Opening it up to expand further, might just turn the tables and then we can't go back. Changing a law is one thing, taking it back, not so easy. How about we wait and see how this DADU decision works first? How about you City Employees, start enforcing the illegal STR laws to prove to us blhmstrs, you can control the legal ones in the future?

Another observation is that, in some ways those people who are currently renting STRs illegally, have reasons to do it well. They don't want complaints, or they'll be turned in as offenders. Most of us aren't going to report our neighbors unless things are really out of hand, that's how they stay in business illegally, as do the illegal DADUs. It's when your neighbors are absentee and you don't know them, then you can't go talk to them if they have a STR. They have no investment in you being happy, and problems with noise, trash, parking, attitudes of people who are never going to see you again, hey they're from Chicago or Ft Lauderdale and will be gone in a couple days...

A lot of whether this works well, will be dependent on numbers, ratios and percents of those who actually reside in Bellingham, as opposed to those who will operate illegally, will not have their STR in their home, (which is good monitoring) but will be those people who buy property, solely to have an income property, which will reduce the number of houses that might house permanent residents. I'm against any TYPE 2 allowance or TYPE 3 A, TOO COMMERCIAL for a residential neighborhood. Get a variance if you have good cause. (Another letter to explain why)

Yes we can find plenty of examples of how certain people, are helped with this type of housing/renting experience. Those folks that attended the meeting and were for STR, told wonderful stories, of all the good aspects of STR, making it sound idyllic. I have to say though, incentivising people who have been acting illegally goes against what i have been taught and a nice fine paid into the homefund would be prudent. Then make them apply, (back of the list) the same way those who have obeyed the laws are required to do. Same sort of system for illegal DADUs. Otherwise you have lost control and we the public can't trust anything the city proposes for monitoring in the future.

If all STR experiences were so positive, we wouldn't be reading article after article in states and cities around our country and in Canada with complaints and no end of problems. One place was kicking out renters who had lived there for years, to capitalize on STR units. Is that what we want for Bellingham? Combined with breweries, recreation and festivals we are going to be a growing tourist destination and when that reaches a certain capacity that's what will happen, because most people are by nature,are greedy capitalists. With the market going up and up, will this raise costs of properties? Adding to our affordable housing dilemma?

Yes, we have wonderful recreation here, but lets not spoil it by overcrowding and putting too much population impact on wildlife, trails, campsites and ski lifts. If we invite and open our arms to hordes of people flocking here, lets protect those of us living here already, as the priority. Lets remember we'll be fighting more traffic (along I -5) to head to the mtns, or anywhere south. Lets have a special fee paid for some rail put in to transport people or a shuttle bus system up the mtn. Anyone who has lived here for decades knows change at a methodical well planned rate, is best. We need to be careful, because once we open that door, there is no closing it and we may ruin what we like about living here. Growth too fast, is a burden, not a blessing and we are already seeing it. It'll get here without us rushing it.

Definitely contributing to the Home fund should be part of the package. Land is also a huge factor in this County as we continue to want to reap the benefits of farmland and recreational areas. Oh,

and lets just take our hotels and turn them into affordable housing units, because they won't be able to compete with STRs once this door is open for type 11 and 111 A.

Mickey McDiarmid
Bellingham resident

Re: STR Ordinance
June 20, 2018

Dear Bellingham City Council Members, Mayor, and Planning Commission,

From our extensive and varied experiences as STR hosts and users, we know a large percentage of travelers are looking for unique, connected, authentic experiences.

We're not sure if data has been collected on the revenue these travelers bring to our city, but we know it's considerable. Many - perhaps most - visitors attracted to this northwest corner want to stay in STRs, 365 days out of the year, to experience Bellingham away from hotel corridors. They want to connect directly with residents in one of a kind, home-like lodging, rather than the impersonal, generic feel of many hotels. They want to be directed to the best of Bellingham, and the majority spend their money at local businesses. They learn about our city and its assets and nuances from residents with a deep caring for Whatcom County, who serve as ambassadors with heart and commitment to the well-being of this place. Travelers and hosts earn and share more than revenue: in an increasingly divided nation, they receive and offer goodwill that can't be measured.

More about that unquantifiable exchange: most humans - whether they know it or not - seek authentic connections to people and place. Receiving this, they experience a fulfillment that money can't buy. As hosts, our family's lives have been positively impacted in myriad ways as a result of this bridge building with strangers, and we know from direct feedback that this is also true for our guests. Just a few stories:

- We hosted and shared a meal with a Ukranian (Crimean) couple, a week before Russia annexed Crimea. They reached out to us afterwards as new and trusted friends, sharing stories of their experience of being in Crimea during this event, and the impact on their family living there.
- We stayed up talking past midnight with a guest who works as a legal advocate for undocumented minors, listening to her share the unbelievably challenging life experiences these youth endure.
- An Iranian couple attending graduate school in Pullman shared how things have changed for them since the 2016 elections (including an inability to travel to Iran, or have their family visit them). They taught us about their culture, and we shared Pacific Northwest nuances.
- Our daughter is in nursing school as a direct result of the stories and guidance share by the many nurses we have hosted, who continue to mentor her.

- A young woman from central California, who had never left her hometown, rode a Greyhound 27 hours to come to our listing to “find herself”. Her dear father was murdered the year prior; she lives in an apartment with her 3 siblings and a dysfunctional mother, with an unsupportive community. She came here to heal and grow. Through quiet time in nature, long walks, reflection, and long talks with us, she left with new perspective - and a determination to go to college (we decided to considerably discount her stay so she could direct those funds toward tuition). She has reached out to us several times since her visit.
- A guest from Oklahoma defied all stereotypes we may have had about the South.
- Mixed race couples have shared their experiences of navigating prejudice in their hometowns, and reflected on Bellingham’s friendliness, but lack of ethnic diversity.
- Famous artists have come to unwind and receive a reality check from nature.
- Countless guests have become engaged or honeymooned in our listings.
- We offer our spaces to nonprofit fundraisers & free housing for funeral attendees.

We could go on and on. So many stories. We host travelers from nearly every state and all corners of the globe. They arrive as strangers and leave as friends. We exchange stories, values, friendly banter, deep discussions, and build mutual understanding and empathy. We open our home and spaces for this partly as a form of social action: direct connection and interpersonal bridge building is what our nation and world need, moving beyond stereotypes and assumptions to discover more about one another with care and curiosity. Intentionally creating these kinds of connections is an honor, a delight and a calling. It makes our and guests’ lives more meaningful, a positive impact that reverberates into the community and beyond.

This transformative interface happens because some (admittedly, not all) hosts strive to create it, and many travelers seek more than a room with a bed, carpet, and cable. In this sense, family run STRs differ considerably from corporate chain hotels. We’re not sure this sort of reciprocity that humans are hungry for happens in any other way on such a large and local scale as consistently as it does via STRs.

We are in favor of some regulation - including taxes, licensing, permits - but encourage you to consider the unintentional consequences of adopting an ordinance that severely limits STRs, such as the 90 day annual rental cap, a confusing categorization of rentals, and an expensive and burdensome CUP process.

Some of these unintended consequences may include:

- Incentivizing apartment and other landlords in urban villages to convert a sizable number of their units to STRs, taking these units out of the long term rental market.
- Removing the existing temporary affordable housing options currently provided via STRs for traveling nurses, visiting professors, or those between living situations. Many of these STRs - such as rooms in people's homes and ADUs - may not become available as long term rentals, as they serve as part time guest room/housing for family.
- Inhibit a gratifying and positive side income stream enabling local residents - community contributors as educators, nonprofit employees, artists, volunteers - to continue to afford to live in the area.
- Open some STRs as long term rentals at market rates, which as a recent Herald article indicates, is not particularly affordable. As long term rentals, these units are more likely to provide housing for newcomers relocating here and/or temporary residents (students) who lack dedication to our community, rather than existing long term residents.
- Creating significant overhead costs in paying a monitoring consulting firm, the CUP issuance process, administrative oversight and enforcement. Some of this will be necessary, but we encourage creative approaches to utilizing resources in a way that supports overall city goals, such as removing the 90 day rental cap and instead requiring hosts to use some of their annual revenue to contribute to the Home Fund, and replacing the CUP with an administrative approval process.
- Protecting and promoting revenue for out of state corporate hotel chains above thoughtfully-crafted, locally run small businesses.
- Severely restricting and/or eliminating one of the most authentic, direct goodwill exchanges that presently exists on an ongoing basis in the United States, local hosts serving as warm-hearted ambassadors to global visitors.

Many of us respect and acknowledge the need for clarity via an ordinance. However, we encourage you to avoid sweeping generalizations and assumptions and make an effort to research and thoroughly understand all the aspects of STRs in Bellingham - including their many unique contributions - before you make your decision.

Thank you for your thoughtful work on this and other issues facing our growing city.

Aimee and Peter Frazier

Aven, Heather M.

From: Pool, Lisa A.
Sent: Tuesday, June 26, 2018 4:47 PM
To: Aven, Heather M.
Subject: FW: short term rentals

Hi -

Please add to the website.

Thanks,
Lisa

Lisa Pool, AICP
Senior Planner
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Mickey McDiarmid
Bellingham resident

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From: Roy Shankman [mailto:shankmans4@comcast.net]
Sent: Tuesday, June 19, 2018 5:56 PM
To: Pool, Lisa A. <lapool@cob.org>
Subject: RE: STR Ordinance

Hello Lisa,

My name is Roy Shankman and my wife Leslie and I were at the City Council meeting last night. We are AirBnb hosts and have lived in the same house in Bellingham for the last 25 years. My wife and I would like to invite you, at your convenience, to come tour our AirBnb suite. I think that an on site visit would be very informative for you and it would be our pleasure to host you.

Thank you,

Roy and Leslie