

More stringent rules coming for short-term rentals in Aurora

More stringent rules will soon be on the books for owners and operators of short-term rental units in Aurora.

Last week, Council voted to proceed with the formal drafting of a new Short-Term Rental Bylaw.

Targeted at units being rented out individually or through third-party sites like Airbnb and Expedia, the bylaw, according to the Town, will implement various requirements on short-term rental property owners and operators, such as obtaining a license with the Town to ensure safety, maintenance and upkeep of licensed properties.

The new bylaw, once formally enacted, will also bring into place a rental compliance monitoring system that will be used by municipal staff in the Bylaw department to allow residents to file complaints associated with short-term rentals.

Moving forward with drafting the bylaw was approved unanimously by Council, but after a healthy debate, local lawmakers said the bylaw can only be enacted once it comes back at Council for one further review.

Councillor Michael Thompson, for instance, questioned staff's recommendations on putting in a demerit system that would penalize owners of short-term rentals for a variety of infractions. If a noise complaint, for instance, was received at the Town, and the complaint was found to be valid, the property owner will receive demerit points on its license.

This process is intended to hold operators accountable and ensure continued compliance with bylaws and Provincial acts while also mitigating impacts to the general community, said Bylaw Manager Alexander Wray in a report to Council.

But Councillor Thompson reiterated his concerns that demerit points might not have lasting consequences.

At General Committee, I spoke about the demerit system and how I felt about the seven points being associated with it when the business license has been revoked, he said. The report talks about the accumulated demerit points being reset annually. I think there are some that should not be reset annually. If they have an infraction against the fire code, if they are operating with a suspended or revoked license, I don't see that getting reset annually.

Stiffer fines should be considered and is something he said he wanted to see when a formal bylaw comes forward.

Councillors nevertheless agreed that moving forward with a bylaw was in the best interests of protecting residents.

I think we're doing the right thing, said Councillor Sandra Humfries, noting similar bylaws have been passed in nearby communities like Newmarket, Georgina and Vaughan. We need to protect ourselves. At the end of the day, that is what this is all about, and protecting the owners. I hope it becomes a very positive implementation. There's a lot of work and engagement with this. I am sure there will be others moving forward but, until then, I am supportive of the motion.

Added Councillor Wendy Gaertner: This is protecting residents against any unwanted issues that could be associated with this. Bed and Breakfasts are terrific and it would help generate some tourism, but it is very important that the residents and their quality of life is not affected. I would like to see more points with respect to posting the business license and also with respect to also a contravention of the Building Code Act because that speaks to safety.

Also supporting the drafting of the Bylaw was Mayor Tom Mrakas.

I don't think any of us disagree with the fact that allowing residents to rent a room, make some extra income, help pay for their property, possibly, that those are all good things, he said. At the same time, we have an obligation to minimize any risk or negative impacts to our community, to our established neighbourhoods, to the residents who live there. That's our obligation. I think by

creating a bylaw that does that, that is fair, I think that is something we need to put forward and those are details that are going to be fleshed out.

When [the draft bylaw comes back, we can look] at moving forward with a proper bylaw that minimizes those negative impacts to our community.

Should the draft bylaw be approved by Council when it is brought forward, it would require all short-term rentals (STR) and bed and breakfasts to obtain a business license and post a sign on their property identifying it as a business. Only one STR or B&B will be permitted on a lot and within one dwelling unit. One off-street parking space will be required for each bedroom rented out. A maximum limit of six guests will also be put in place.

Recent data suggests that there is approximately 56 to 115 unique STR properties in Aurora, said Wray. This number fluctuates seasonally and can be impacted by community events, seasonal travel trends, sports tournaments, etc.

On average, Aurora's STRs charge an average of \$113 CDN per night. 68 per cent of Aurora listings are classified as Single-Family Homes with 64 per cent of listings advertising the entire home for rent. This translates to, on average, between 36-74 entire home listings at any given time.

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