

Short-term rental fees adjusted for 'fairness' across Aurora

New rules for the operation of short-term rentals in Aurora 'like AirBNBs' have been adjusted for 'fairness' ahead of enactment.

Changes to proposed new fees presented earlier this year at Council were tentatively approved at last week's General Committee meeting. These include a reduction in initial licensing fees for hosts, a lower renewal rate for those registering their properties as short-term rentals (STRs), and the implementation of a fee structure for STR companies that is based on the number of rental units they own within Aurora as opposed to a flat rate.

Responding to concerns from Council earlier this year on a demerit point-based system for owners, which local lawmakers said was too lenient, a new demerit system will, according to staff, better address community concerns.

'Staff have reviewed the demerit point system and adjusted the point values to better reflect the severity of offences and address concerns raised by members of Council,' said Alexander Wray, Manager of Bylaw Services for the Town of Aurora. 'Demerit points will apply on an accumulating basis when violation is noted to a maximum of 15 points and reset annually. Staff will continue to seek voluntary compliance and lead with an education approach wherever possible prior to applying demerit points.'

Council members had previously criticized the 'resetting' of demerit points each year, particularly for less minor compliance issues.

Through the Town's proposed implementation of AMPS 'the Administrative Monetary Penalty System' staff will have more enforcement options for non-compliance.

'Once implemented, the AMPS will provide Bylaw Services the ability to apply escalating fines to an offender who repeatedly violates municipal bylaws,' said Mr. Wray in his report. 'Escalating fines are an effective enforcement tool which also reflects the severity of the violation. The applicability of escalating fines would be determined by pre-set criteria to ensure fair and equal application of the process.'

Councillors were receptive to the changes at last week's meeting, particularly the beefing up of the demerit point system.

'I am very pleased to see they have been increased,' said Councillor Wendy Gaertner, adding that three demerit points for contravention of the Town's Property Standards Bylaw, with respect to grass and garbage, as well as noise, are going to be issues Council will hear about down the line.

She asked whether the Town could adopt escalating charges in these situations, based on complaints.

Mr. Wray said through AMPS the Town would have the chance to introduce escalating fines for 'offences that continue to happen within a set period.'

'This is something that is currently in place in other municipalities in the GTA in order to deal with continued issues,' he said 'We feel it would be most appropriate as opposed to continuing to apply points' if we have an alternative tool to continue to address long-term compliance.'

Responded Councillor Gaertner, 'The whole idea behind this is not only to ensure the safety of the people who are visiting but also the neighbours. We want it to be as good an experience as possible for neighbours. We know noise and how a property is kept is usually very important to a neighbourhood and it really is a lot of trouble and work for us.'

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter