

Tightened restrictions eyed for Aurora's Airbnbs

Aurora has begun the process of examining regulations on local Airbnbs and other short-term rentals.

Council last week unanimously approved a motion from Mayor Tom Mrakas calling on staff to ?examine the feasibility of passing a bylaw to license, regulate and govern Airbnb and short-term rental accommodations? within Aurora.

Short-term rental accommodations in residential areas have resulted in concerns over excessive noise, fire safety and mischief in ?many municipalities,? said Mayor Mrakas, and beginning this process will help fill a bylaw gap.

?I think it behoves us to be proactive in this instance and ask staff to look at how we can come up with some regulations,? he said. ?Right now, we have none so let's take that step, let's ask staff to look at it. I can assure you right now we're not hearing anything [in the way of complaints]?but once other municipalities ? and they are ? pass regulations, the problem Airbnbs [tend] to flock to where people don't have any regulations, so that's why I think it is important for us to move forward on this as quickly as possible and have staff look at something that can come back to us.?

The Mayor stressed that he is in no way trying to ban short-term rentals, but following conversations with York Regional Police, the Central York Fire Services, and other stakeholders, having no bylaw pertaining to Aurora could prove challenging in the future.

?If there is a call and [Police] need to go out to an Airbnb or short-term rental accommodation, that bill for the YRP gets sent to the property owner,? Mayor Mrakas concluded. ?It is something we need to look at because it puts the onus on the property owner to say, ?if you're going to rent out your property, then you're going to make sure you're not renting it [for it] to become a party house.?

Speaking in support of the motion, Councillor Rachel Gilliland said she welcomed the opportunity to address the issue ?before something bad actually happens.?

?I have heard stories through certain friends and family where they have been part of Airbnbs where bad things have occurred and we don't want them to happen,? she said. ?I also think the people who do run [these accommodations] out of their homes do follow the rules and do comply, that they want these regulations. They don't want the bad apples to ruin it for them. I don't think a total ban is something that we would want to walk down, but they are asking to have some sort of licensing or regulation that we can follow and kind of respect so we can avoid that.

?Hopefully [the report] will explore the idea of charging [any fees occurred by the York Regional Police in responding to Airbnb

issues] the property owner. I think it does make them think twice about who they are actually renting to and it develops an accountability. At the same time, it is important that we do offer short-term rentals for various reasons and I think there is a need for it. I am really looking forward [to the report]. ?

Added Councillor Wendy Gaertner: ?I think this is an important idea. We're not talking about reinventing the wheel. We have some good examples of what municipalities have been doing.?

By Brock Weir