

Re short term rental legislation # (Airbnb) 3/25/18

We are a retired couple who rent out a room in our home via Airbnb. This has been a wonderful opportunity for us because otherwise our only income is from social security. Airbnb allows us to live in our home. As Airbnb hosts, we've observed that about 20% of the people who stay at our Airbnb would not come to this area otherwise. These guests were looking for a place to vacation somewhere in New England and not necessarily in Vermont until they discovered our place.

Once they arrive, our guests virtually always go out to eat at local restaurants, spend money in local shops, and participate in other local activities, boosting the local economy. A large proportion of guests are young people who would not venture here otherwise and who are discovering Vermont for the first time because they have found an affordable and interesting way to travel. Many have vowed to come back and a number of them have. (The vast majority have loved Brattleboro!)

Comparing Airbnb to traditional bed and breakfasts (or motels/hotels) is like comparing apples to oranges. Most Airbnb's consist of only one income-producing room or apartment rather than a series of rooms. Most Airbnb hosts we know are supplementing a modest income. These are do-it-yourself operations. Airbnbs are more like the home gardeners who set out a table in front of their house to sell excess garden veggies compared to a large farm selling produce to grocery stores. It doesn't make sense to compare us to larger operations with multiple rooms.

However, please note that we do pay the same percentage of rooms and meals tax as the larger hotels and motels. Airbnb adds the 10% tax on to the customer charge with each booking, and automatically pays the tax directly to Vermont. Vermont gets its tax without fail from every Airbnb booking.

Airbnb is self-regulating. The guest and host each post reviews online at the end of each stay. This means that guests are on their best behavior – keeping the rooms remarkably clean - and hosts are as well, communicating regularly, often sitting down to tea with the guests. Since Airbnbs host one party at a time, they tend to be very much in tune with their guests. While there are also some conventional bed and breakfasts where this personal touch is provided, we are not aware of a review system outside of Airbnb that keeps the communication so very clear in both directions. If an Airbnb weren't clean enough, for instance, the reviews would show that immediately, thus affecting our business.

Recently, we visited an Airbnb host who has an Airbnb with a composting toilet as well as a shower in a separate dwelling. This is a gorgeous, if unconventional, Airbnb. We are hoping that some of the unusual and interesting Airbnbs in Vermont - treehouses, school buses - will be able to continue as such. They provide some of the character for the Airbnb experience. We are concerned that rigid regulations might close these sorts of offerings.

Airbnb is bringing new tourists (and possible future residents!) to Vermont. This is an exciting new opportunity for boosting the economy in Vermont. It is also providing a way for people with a low or modest income to remain in Vermont in their homes. We would hate to see regulations and fees that might cause these golden opportunities to be lost. Thank you for considering our perspective.

Liza King, Rick Neumann 30 Strand Ave, Brattleboro lizaking1@comcast.net