

John Long

From: Chris Dwan <chris@dwan.org>
Sent: Tuesday, October 16, 2018 12:07 PM
To: Board of Aldermen; City Clerk Contact
Cc: Dan Flynn; Mika Cheng; George Proakis
Subject: Short term rentals
Attachments: 2018 10 short term rentals.pdf

Alderfolks and selected others,

I recently shared my experiences as a short-term landlord with Alderman Niedergang. He suggested that I share those thoughts with the entire board. Please find attached a letter with my thoughts on this topic.

Thanks very much for all the hard work and long hours you put in for our city. I truly appreciate what you do.

-Chris Dwan

October 16, 2018

To the Aldermen of the City of Somerville,

I am writing to share my thoughts and experiences regarding short-term rentals in Somerville. I am glad that the city and the Board have decided to bring clarity and consistency to this topic. I look forward to bringing my property into compliance with whatever regulations we adopt.

My family owns a duplex on Ivaloo Street. We live in the upstairs unit. We rent out the downstairs using "Vacation Rental By Owner" (VRBO), which is a competitor to Air B&B. VRBO does not offer single rooms in a shared unit, it caters to families rather than business travelers, and it allows us to preferentially find customers for longer stays rather than single nights. I believe that this approach would be a fine model as the city considers the behaviors we want to encourage in this market.

The short-term rental arrangement was already in place when we bought the property in late 2014. We chose to purchase the house with the downstairs furnished, hoping to continue the success of the previous owners. Through them, we secured an introduction to one of their long-term tenants. That person still rents from us several months out of each year. Her daughter teaches at Harvard during the Winter Semester. Our tenant takes care of her grandchild during those times, living with us and walking to her daughter's home in Cambridge.

We rent the unit year-round, excluding two weeks at the end of November. We block this time for repairs, and also to host family members over the thanksgiving holiday.

What little stress and confusion we have encountered has generally happened at the turnovers between tenants. There are always questions of early arrivals overlapping with late departures, scheduling challenges with cleaners, management of luggage and cars, and so on. Based on this experience, we have a strong preference for tenants who stay a week or more. Longer-term tenants tend to become members of the neighborhood, meeting neighbors and in one case that we know of, obtaining library cards!

While we have an off-street parking space available, only a few guests use it. Most of them seem to prefer to walk and to make use of mass transit. We have a binder filled with menus and advertisements for local businesses, and we find that guests update it themselves when information changes.

From speaking with other residents, I understand that my experience is not universal. I have heard stories about terrible behavior by Air B&B guests, ill-maintained properties, and unsafe conditions. I would be happy to see Somerville adopt and enforce a consistent set of regulations. The current ambiguity creates room for disruptive and unsafe practices. The draft ordinances that I have seen seem to strike a good balance. I fully support a system of registration, inspection, and even licensing -- provided that it is clearly worded and consistently enforced.

Thank you for all your hard work for our city.

Sincerely,
Chris Dwan
Ivaloo Street