

Licensing, by-laws approved to better address short-term rental concerns

May 14, 2021 — The City is beefing up its regulatory framework when it comes to addressing concerns with short-term rental (STR) operations in St. Catharines.

On Monday night, City Council approved a Licensing and Administrative Monetary Penalty System (AMPS) for STRs, such as those operated through online portals like AirBnB and VRBO. These new tools compliment amendments made to the City's Zoning By-law late in 2020 that redefined STRs as home-based businesses. The amendments, combined with licensing and AMPS, will allow the City to better regulate, and enforce compliance with City by-laws, as they relate to STRs. Both will be phased into effect starting January 2022. Until that time STRs are not permitted under the City's Zoning By-law.

Short-term rental operations have historically not been permitted in residences in St. Catharines. Certain properties operating as STRs became frequent sites of complaints related to noise, parking, property standards and waste.

In 2019 the City began extensive public consultation and research on how to best regulate STRs and address problems with some operators. The Zoning By-law amendments moved STRs into the regulatory framework by permitting them in residences provided they operate as a home-based business at the operator's primary residence. This effectively means operators will only be able to operate an STR as a secondary use from one residence, specifically the unit they live in. This addresses issues of full-time STRs absorbing housing stock, while still allowing homeowners to gain ancillary income through renting of their home.

"This is a tremendous step towards a better housing landscape in our City. Our residents can still rent their home if they are headed out of town, and visitors to the region can still utilize short-term rentals," said Director of Planning and Building Services Tami Kitay, adding, "at the same time we can better enforce rules surrounding STRs, penalizing those few bad actors, and ensure residential areas continue to provide long-term housing options for those who call the City home."

Monday's addition of Licensing and AMPS rounds out the regulatory framework, requiring STR operators to apply for a licence with the City, ensuring the properties follow various City by-laws, the Fire Code, Building Code and other safety regulations. The creation of an AMPS provides the City with enforcement mechanisms related to by-law and licensing compliance, allowing for monetary penalties to be leveled through an internal process.

In addition to monetary penalties through the AMPS the licensing by-law establishes a system of demerit points associated with various infractions ranging from Fire and Building Code violations to waste, parking and noise related issues. Infractions carry point weights ranging from two to 10 points. Demerit points will remain active against a licence for two years, with penalties, including licence suspension, incurred based on demerit point totals.

“The development of this Short Term Rental licensing and regulation program is a strong step forward to better addressing some of the issues we’ve seen increasing over the years – including noise and property standards complaints, parking issues and more associated with STRs,” said Mayor Walter Sendzik. “Thanks to City staff for getting this new program in place and to Councillor Bill Phillips for his advocacy and leadership on this issue.”

As the system is phased in, three new by-law enforcement officers will be brought on board in 2022, allowing for enhanced by-law enforcement on evenings and weekends when STR issues typically occur. These officers will expand the City’s by-law enforcement complement, addressing not only STR complaints but other important by-law issues such as property standard complaints.

For more information visit stcatharines.ca/ShortTermRentals.

-30-

Contact:
Tami Kitay
Director of Planning and Building Services
tkitay@stcatharines.ca