

**THE D.C. ZONING COMMISSION
Z.C. Case No. 19-15
October 17, 2019**

**Testimony of Yvette Bourcicot
Policy Manager, Airbnb**

Introduction

Good evening, Chairman Hood and members of the Commission. My name is Yvette Bourcicot, Policy Manager at Airbnb.

Airbnb supports the proposed zoning text amendment regulating short-term rentals or STRs, which will allow them as accessory uses in residences. We're joined here by some of our hosts. Can all of the hosts who will be affected by this law please raise their hands?

The new STR law passed by the Council requires STR hosts to obtain licenses from DCRA and to comply with Zoning Regulations. This zoning amendment will allow the Zoning Regulations to address STRs in a manner that is fair and consistent with the new law.

Background/How it works

Airbnb is an online rental platform that provides opportunities for District residents to rent out all or a portion of their homes on a short-term basis. Guests use our website to choose a place to stay and either meet their hosts in person when they arrive or make other arrangements for access to the homes. Airbnb is just one of many platforms that helps to facilitate short-term rentals. Altogether, short-term rentals represent a substantial number of accommodations for visitors to the District. Our platform alone has 9,700 active listings, and each one represents a win for a host, a win for a guest, and a win for the District. Let's talk about each one.

For many Airbnb hosts, home sharing has been a lifeline. It provides supplemental income to help offset rising rents and property taxes and keep housing affordable for many residents. Many Airbnb hosts report that they earn several thousands of dollars in extra annual income, which they then dedicate to paying their mortgages and property taxes. Home-sharing has even helped some of our District hosts avoid foreclosure or eviction and helped some of our elderly residents age in place.

For guests, STRs can be a godsend. DC has among the highest hotel rates in the country, and lodging costs can put a visit to the nation's capital out of reach for the average American family. Affordable STRs are an option that allows more travelers to explore the rich history and culture the DC has to offer.

And STRs are great for the District. Short-term rentals encourage tourists to stay in, and patronize, all parts of the District. For example, there are no hotels east of the Anacostia River, and home sharing has enabled visitors to discover and enjoy those amazing and vibrant areas. In addition, according to our data, Airbnb and our D.C. host community are proud to have contributed more than \$45 million in tax revenue to the District over the past four years. These tax dollars help D.C. fund everything from education to infrastructure to affordable housing.

Opponents' issues

Opponents to the District's STR legislation have argued that Airbnb is facilitating conversion of housing units into hotel rooms or the commercialization of residential neighborhoods. This is a fallacy. STRs are already permitted in owner-occupied homes under existing home occupation regulations. In fact, while the technology-driven platforms for STRs may be relatively new, the concept of short-term rentals is not. People have been permitted to rent out their homes in the context of the "inn" definition of the "lodging" category.

The Zoning Commission's amendments do not create a new category of transient use -- they merely add clarity and flexibility to existing regulations on permitted accessory uses and streamline the Council's recent legislation on STRs. Together with the Council's legislation, the amendments will ensure that accountability and operational measures are in place for STR operators and renters.

We fully support the Office of Planning analysis and recommendation that the proposed zoning text should not duplicate operational parameters in the Council legislation, which are better managed and enforced by DCRA. The zoning text should be flexible to ensure DCRA and the Council can respond quickly and efficiently to the evolving technology of web-based STR platforms. We believe the

proposed zoning text strikes the right balance between operational controls for STRs, which should be governed by DCRA, and permitted uses zoning.

Conclusion

Thank you for considering this proposal. We hope it earns your support. Airbnb and all our District resident hosts look forward to working with you as this process moves forward, and I am available for any questions you may have.