



Date: April 28, 2023
To: Planning and Zoning Commission Members
From: Patrick R. Zenner, Development Services Manager
Bill Cantin, Neighborhood Communications Coordinator
Re: STR Survey Results

Background

Beginning in June 2021, the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) has been actively drafting proposed regulatory standards addressing short-term rentals (STRs). This activity followed the original preparation of standards on the same topic between 2018 and 2019. An ordinance was introduced in November 2019 which was subsequently amended, remanded to the Commission, and then removed from further consideration by Council in December 2020. At the time of its removal from consideration, Council requested that a new simplified ordinance be prepared that also evaluated the impact that such operations have on the City's affordable housing stock.


When undertaking this new ordinance, the PZC started with attempting to quantify what they saw as issues with allowing an open, unregulated STR industry and what values they were trying to preserve in the community. The PZC then moved to conceptual descriptions of what would and would not be allowed before drafting a proposed ordinance and submitting it to City Council for an initial review. Following Council review on December 19, 2022, in a joint Council-Commission work session, the PZC was asked to conduct a survey of the community to gather public input on the proposed ordinance.

Survey Process

In response to the Council's direction and after conferring with the Commission regarding the staff's administration of the requested public engagement, Planning Division staff prepared a 7-question survey intended to discern public opinion relating to general regulation of short-term rentals and the preservation of affordable housing. The survey asked the following yes/no questions:

- Do you presently offer any residence you own or rent as a short-term rental?
- Do you support limitations on the location of short-term rentals?

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- Do you support limitations on the number of short-term rental licenses a property owner or authorized tenant may obtain?
- Do you support minimum regulation standards for short-term rentals?
- Do you support preservation of affordable housing within the City?
- Do you support limitations on the number of days a dwelling unit can be rented for short-term rental collection?
- Should such a day limit be established based upon the location of the dwelling?

Respondents were strongly encouraged to review the draft regulatory standards and submit written comments on them to ensure that their thoughts were properly communicated to the Planning Commission and Council.

Survey input was collected using the City of Columbia's BeHeard platform. The survey was promoted widely, including the following avenues:

- Planning Department, Neighborhood News and Activities, and Housing Programs listservs (458, 480, and 600 members respectively)
- Nextdoor, an online service designed to bring neighbors and neighborhoods together, with 20,970 households currently registered
- Press releases
- City of Columbia social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)

Surveys were collected for six weeks, closing on March 24, 2023. A total of 434 individuals submitted survey responses. In addition, 54 written responses were submitted, 28 through BeHeard and an additional 26 via the Planning Department email.

Methodology and Findings

Survey Responses

Responses to the seven survey questions were aggregated by the following parameters:

- Overall responses
- Respondents by City Council Ward
- Respondents indicating they own STRs
- Respondents indicating they do **NOT** own STRs

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Overall, respondents were generally not supportive of limitations on the location of STRs (63% against), the number of STR licenses held by an individual property owner (60% against), or the number of days a STR can be rented for revenue collection (71% against). There was, however, fairly strong support for minimum registration standards (59% in favor) and for the preservation of affordable housing (74% in favor). These findings for the most part hold true throughout the aggregated analysis, though there is some variation between Council Wards. For detailed analysis of all findings, please see **Appendix I** (attached).

Written Responses

Written responses were evaluated by how they were received, with one group from BeHeard and the other from the Planning email. Staff evaluated these responses to identify common opinions, questions, and observations. ChatGPT was used to enhance this review and clarify responses by entering the raw responses and then using the prompt “Review the following text and provide a summary of the comments”. These summarized responses were then in turn re-entered into the software using the same prompt to generate the overall summaries that are provided below. Both the full and summarized responses from BeHeard and the Planning email are included in **Appendices II through V**.

Following are the overall summaries of this text analysis:

- **Summary of BeHeard responses**

Based on the public input received, the most common opinion of short-term rentals is that they offer benefits to the community such as providing affordable housing, boosting the local economy, and creating job opportunities. However, there is a lack of consensus on how to regulate them. Some support limited regulations, such as conditional licensing systems and fees to fund city oversight, while others oppose stricter regulations on the number of rental days or limiting the number of properties an owner can have. There are also concerns that regulations may negatively impact affordable housing or unfairly punish all STR operators for the actions of a few. Overall, the opinions expressed suggest that STRs can be beneficial but require careful consideration of the regulations that are put in place.

- **Summary of public input received through Planning email**

The most common opinion expressed in the emails received is that short-term rentals should be regulated, but the proposed regulations should be reasonable and not infringe on property owner rights. Many authors expressed concern that the proposed regulations are excessive, unnecessarily complicated, and may impact their constitutional rights. They advocated for regulations that treat short-term rentals in the same way as long-term rentals and do not place undue financial or

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administrative burdens on property owners or city staff. Some authors also argued that short-term rentals are important for the local economy by providing additional accommodations for visitors. However, there are some differences in opinions on specific aspects of regulations, such as the use of 30 and 120 days to determine the amount of "business" being handled by the property or the need for surcharges on short-term rental conversions.

Next Steps

Given the findings from the survey, staff believes there is a need to re-examine the provisions that have been prepared and identify opportunities to reduce the possible areas of conflict. Without such action, it is staff's concern that any public hearings will result in frustrated stakeholders taking their concerns to the Council who in turn may make more significant changes to the proposed regulations than may be necessary.

The results of the survey and the associated attachments as well as this memo are being provided to the Council for their consideration. As has been previously communicated throughout this process, moving forward with an ordinance that is supportable by Council is essential such that the efforts invested thus far are brought to some level of closure.

In this vain, staff intends to request that another joint meeting between the Council and Commission be scheduled in the near future (likely late June or July) to allow for a dialogue to be established. Until such meeting is held, review of the comments should be undertaken and provisions within the proposed regulations that can be modified or removed should be evaluated.

Given the time of the year, staff does not recommend convening public hearings on this matter until the fall semester begins to ensure that all impacted residents will be able to participate in any future hearings. This delay will allow the Commission and Council to meet as well as afford an opportunity to review and possibly revise the proposed regulations to address community concerns.

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