


Statesman

Lubbock taking steps to regulate short-term rental houses

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Lubbock has no regulations specific to short-term rental houses available through websites like Airbnb and HomeAway, but that will soon change.

When city leaders discussed this earlier in the year, their responses were to wait and see what comes out of the state legislative session, where short-term rentals were expected to be addressed after more than 10 cities have passed varying policies. But the legislative session wrapped up a few months ago with no bills related to short-term rentals approved.

Now this week the City of Lubbock hired professional consultants to recommend local regulations. These regulations may do with noise, occupancy limits, specific home locations, vehicle limits, trash requirements and more.

Lubbock hired the Colorado-based company LODGINGRevs, which specializes in rental policy. The city's first goal, as discussed in a public work session this week, is to create a registration process where homeowners have to register their home if it's being rented out for short-term use. When homes are registered, the

city will begin enforcing the city's hotel occupancy tax (HOT), like many of the larger cities in the state have. Right now, according to the City of Lubbock, renters are paying the state's tax but not the local tax.

An ordinance to require the registration and the HOT payments is expected to go to the council in late August.

"People that are using those services need to be paying the hotel tax, much like you do if you stay at any of our hotels in town," Mayor Dan Pope said in his weekly address video. "I think that levels the playing field. We took action to hire a firm to help us with the collection of that."

When these rules are adopted, the city will work with LODGINGRevs to draft potential regulations.

"There will be subsequent action we're asked to take around short-term rentals," the mayor continued. "I think we're on the track to a very logical way of both, first and foremost protection the homeowners' property rights, which is most important, and then second trying to make sure that any of this activity doesn't impact our neighborhoods negatively. I think that's the balance we're trying to go down."

Councilwoman Latrelle Joy, who along with Councilman Randy Christian has been meeting with stakeholders, said one of the concerns is how the lodging tax is collected, and city staff said it will be the responsibility of the homeowner, who according to the city has several methods through the host website to collect the fee, and will then pay the tax to the city through a process LODGINGRevs will set up.

The city's hotel occupancy tax rate is 7.5%

Airbnb and HomeAway are platforms that let property owners offer short-term rental houses (apartments, or just rooms) travelers can use for short-term stays. The city defines short-term rentals as the rental of a residential dwelling unit for periods of less than 30 consecutive days. Some local homeowners are known to just rent out a room or stay with friends while their home is being rented, for extra income. But there are also instances where investors buy homes only to be used as short-term rental houses.

Councilman Christian also recommended a rule prohibiting these homes for being used as party or event rentals — meaning short-term rental homes can't be rented for the use of a party or large social gathering.

The city did not adopt any ordinances this week, but rather hired the firm that will help write these ordinances and assist the city through the implementation process.

Pope said during the work session that the large majority of renters have been in compliance, but said he's heard complaints from a few citizens about short-term rental homes disrupting neighborhoods.

In an article published in January, A-J Media spoke with a homeowner in Lakeridge who described vehicles lining much of the block, trash spilling over the trash containers and strangers coming and going, day and night, from a home across the street. He said it used to be occasional occurrences, but now it's practically every day.

A representative at Airbnb sent A-J media the following statement earlier this year: "We're always happy to partner with local governments on clear, fair rules, though we have found from experience that issues like noise and trash are best addressed by preexisting regulations that pertain to all homes. Home sharing delivers a robust economic impact to Lubbock, and we look forward to working with policymakers to ensure the protection of local hosts' property rights."

The City of Lubbock says there are at least 300 homes available for short-term rental use in the city.

"We want to set up an environment where we can proactively ensure the safety and well-being of our residents living in those neighborhoods where (short-term rentals) are operating," said Blu Kostelich, chief financial officer at the city. "We believe that this collaboration with LODGINGRevs will give us that ability, the ability to maintain the neighborhoods."

LODGINGRevs in the future will present potential rules and regulations the city can adopt, and it will be up to the city council to adopt all or some of those new regulations for short-term rentals.