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POLITICS

Council approves bylaw for Airbnb, short-term rentals in London, Ont.



By [Andrew Graham](#) • 980 CFPL
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In this photo illustration, the Airbnb app seen displayed on a smartphone screen. **Getty Images**

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City councillors in [London](#), Ont., have approved a bylaw that aims to regulate short-term accommodations provided through platforms such as [Airbnb](#).

In a move that's been [years in the making](#), council granted final approval during a meeting on Tuesday afternoon, but not before a public participation meeting in late March drew backlash from dozens of local hosts who voiced concerns over losing business due to the new regulations.

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Under the now-approved bylaw, a short-term accommodation refers to a temporary stay at a property that is 29 consecutive days or less.

Hosts are restricted to only listing rentals from their own homes and will also need to obtain a licence. Each stay is also required to pay London's four per cent municipal accommodation tax, also known as the hotel tax.

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Operating without a licence may result in a fine of \$500 and could be doubled upon repeat offences. Other bylaw violations may result in a fine of \$300.

The bylaw will come into force on Oct. 1.

During Tuesday's meeting, Ward 2 Coun. Shawn Lewis motioned to have the bylaw come into force in early September, but later withdrew his motion after city staff explained it needed more time.

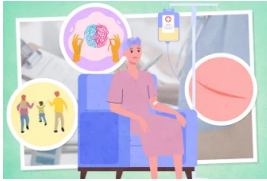
"In order to do the bylaw, we have to have a public participation meeting to be able to proceed with the next step. There is not sufficient time with the

September 1 implementation to do a public participation meeting and to be able to get the mechanisms in place subsequent to that meeting,” said city treasurer Anna Lisa Barbon.

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The bylaw found opposition in Ward 11 Coun. Stephen Turner, who disagreed that the bylaw would achieve all of what it set out to do.

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The discussion surrounding the bylaw first began in an effort to quell nuisance parties stemming from short-term accommodations, but grew to also potentially address [housing concerns in the city](#).

In [a report attached to the bylaw](#), city staff wrote “from a longer-term perspective, the licensing of short-term accommodations may help reduce the

number of rental units that are removed from the rental market for short-term stays.”

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“What’s being proposed is in essence basically a backdoor expropriation by other means to try and increase the number of units available on the market for longer-term housing,” Turner said during Tuesday’s meeting.

“To use this bylaw as a tool to try and infuse more housing into the city, I think that’s probably not a really good plan and I really strongly advise against it.”

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“Coun. Turner highlighted we particularly need affordable housing in the city, and I don’t disagree with him there ... however, we need housing at all price points across the city,” Lewis said, in defence of the bylaw.

“This is just a tiny part of addressing the concerns when it comes to housing in our city, but important it does address the quality of our neighbourhoods as well,” Ward 9 Coun. Anna Hopkins added.

In response to Turner’s concerns, Ward 5 Coun. Maureen Cassidy asked city staff to reiterate the bylaw’s predicted impact on housing.

“We have heard from our director of municipal housing that he feels that this will have a positive impact on affordability,” responded deputy city manager Scott Mathers.

“Maybe not at the lowest levels of affordability, but would provide benefit to many of the Londoners looking for housing.”

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All councillors apart from Turner and Ward 1 Coun. Michael van Holst voted to pass the bylaw, while Ward 4 Coun. Jesse Helmer recused himself from voting as he has rented his home on Airbnb in the past.

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