

# City of Somerville Planning Division

## **Short-term Rentals Community Discussion**

**This presentation and other documents will be available at:**  
[www.somervillema.gov/strs](http://www.somervillema.gov/strs)

# Why we are here

- We want to hear your questions, opinions, and concerns about short-term rentals in Somerville
- We want to explore with you ideas about how the city should regulate them



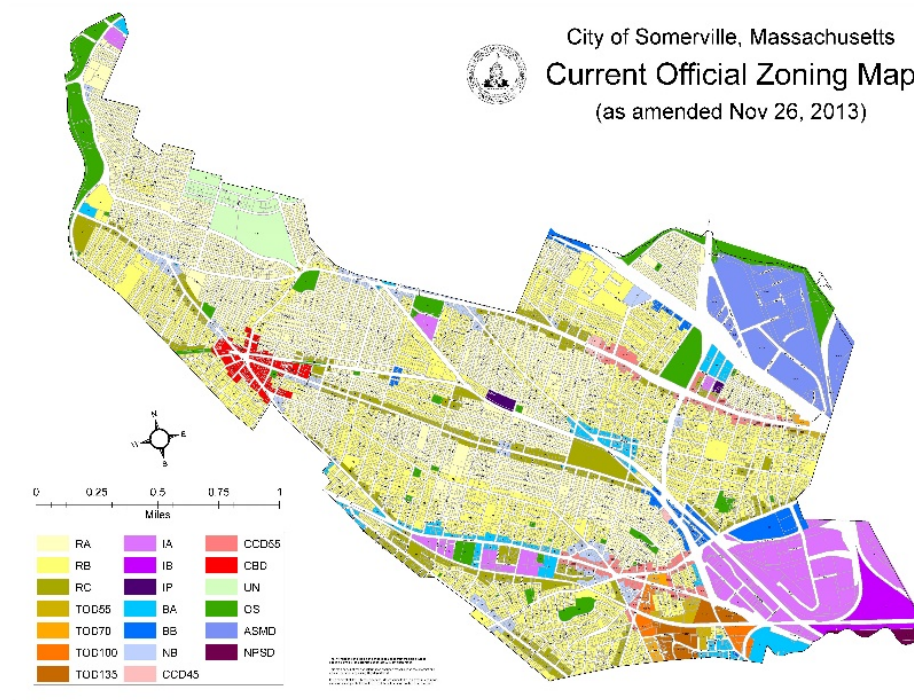
# What is a short-term rental (STR)?

- The rental of a residential unit in exchange for payment as residential accommodations for a duration of 30 days or less
- Airbnb is the most popular service for STRs in Somerville



# What are the current regulations?

Some STRs are allowed by the Zoning Code as a **Tourist Home Accessory Use**



**BUT:** The Tourist Home Accessory Use is limited to the rental of bedrooms. It does not permit renting entire units.



Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone  
City of Somerville

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# Zoning Regulations

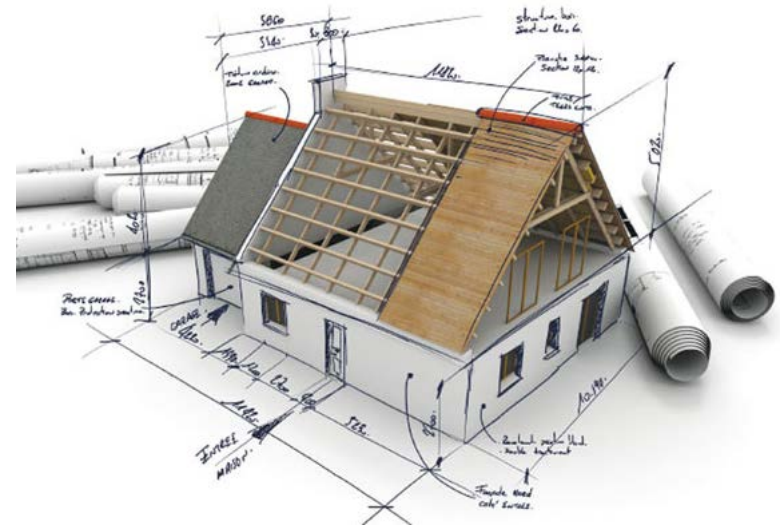
## Tourist homes must meet the following zoning code conditions:

- Units to be used for STR must be an owner-occupied principal residence
- Renters cannot operate an STR in their rental space
- Up to three (3) rooms are permitted to be rented, except that RA (primarily one and two family homes) and RB (like RA but includes three family homes) zones require a special permit for three (3) rooms
- Renting three (3) rooms requires additional parking (1-2 rooms does not)
- Only one unit per building may be used to rent rooms on a short-term basis
- ***An entire unit cannot be rented on a short-term basis***



# Building Code Guidelines

- Different buildings are grouped into categories by use and occupancy classification with varying requirements of safety
- **Additional safety measures are required, by the state building code, for spaces converted to a transient use,** defined by the building code as the occupancy of a dwelling for thirty days or less



# Building Code Requirements



- **Additional safety measures may include the following and more:** automatic sprinkler system, fire doors, fire walls, exit signage, draft stopping, manual fire alarm, exit signage, emergency lights, and an extra emergency escape
- *Homeowner-occupied, detached 1- or 2-family homes that offer five or fewer rooms for rent are exempted.*



# Enforcement



- Current enforcement is complaint based, and ISD investigates matters that complaints are received on
- If you leave your contact information at the time of complaint, the inspector will keep you updated as the case progresses





# Enforcement Steps

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1. The complaint is investigated via site visits to the property and online
2. If a violation is verified, a notice will be sent, and the Building Inspector also attempts to contact the STR owner to explain it
3. If compliance is not met in a timely manner, tickets will begin to be issued by the Building Inspector, typically once a week for three weeks
4. If compliance is still not met after the issuance of three tickets, the matter will typically be filed in court



# STR numbers

Hosts	Renters
Average age: 38	Average age: 34
Annual earnings for a typical host: \$6,600	Average length of stay: 3.6 nights
57% female	97% of rentals were for 4 or fewer people
813 Active Listings	Average group size: 2

*From Airbnb 2017 data*

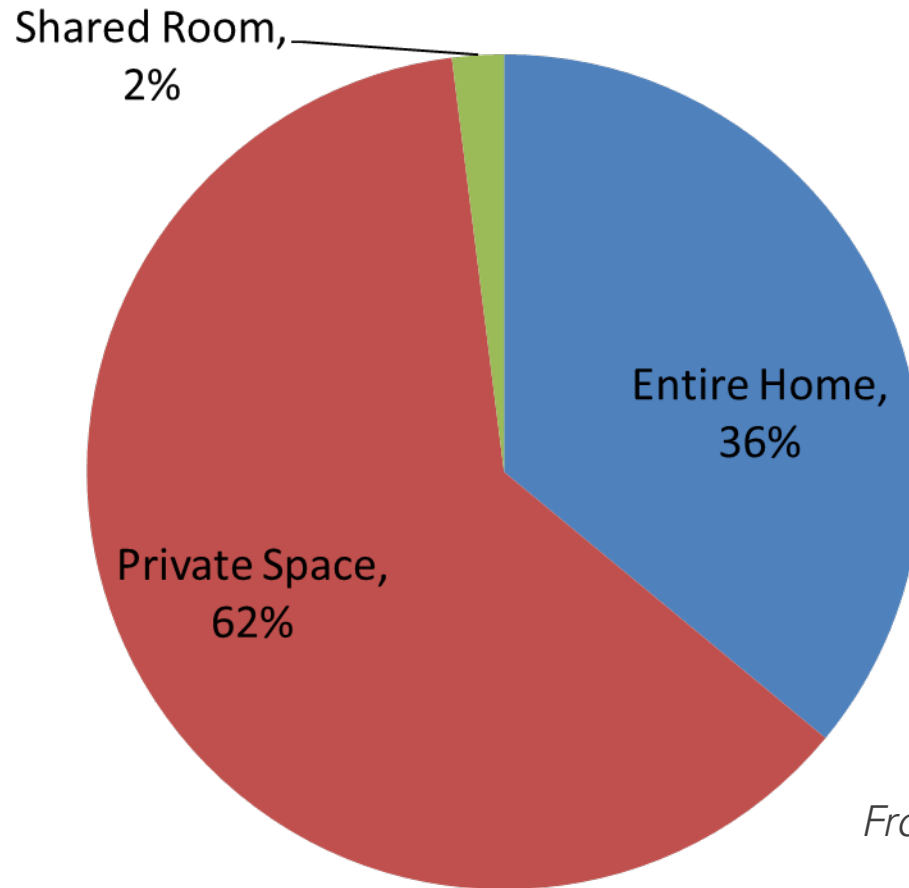


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# Types of STR

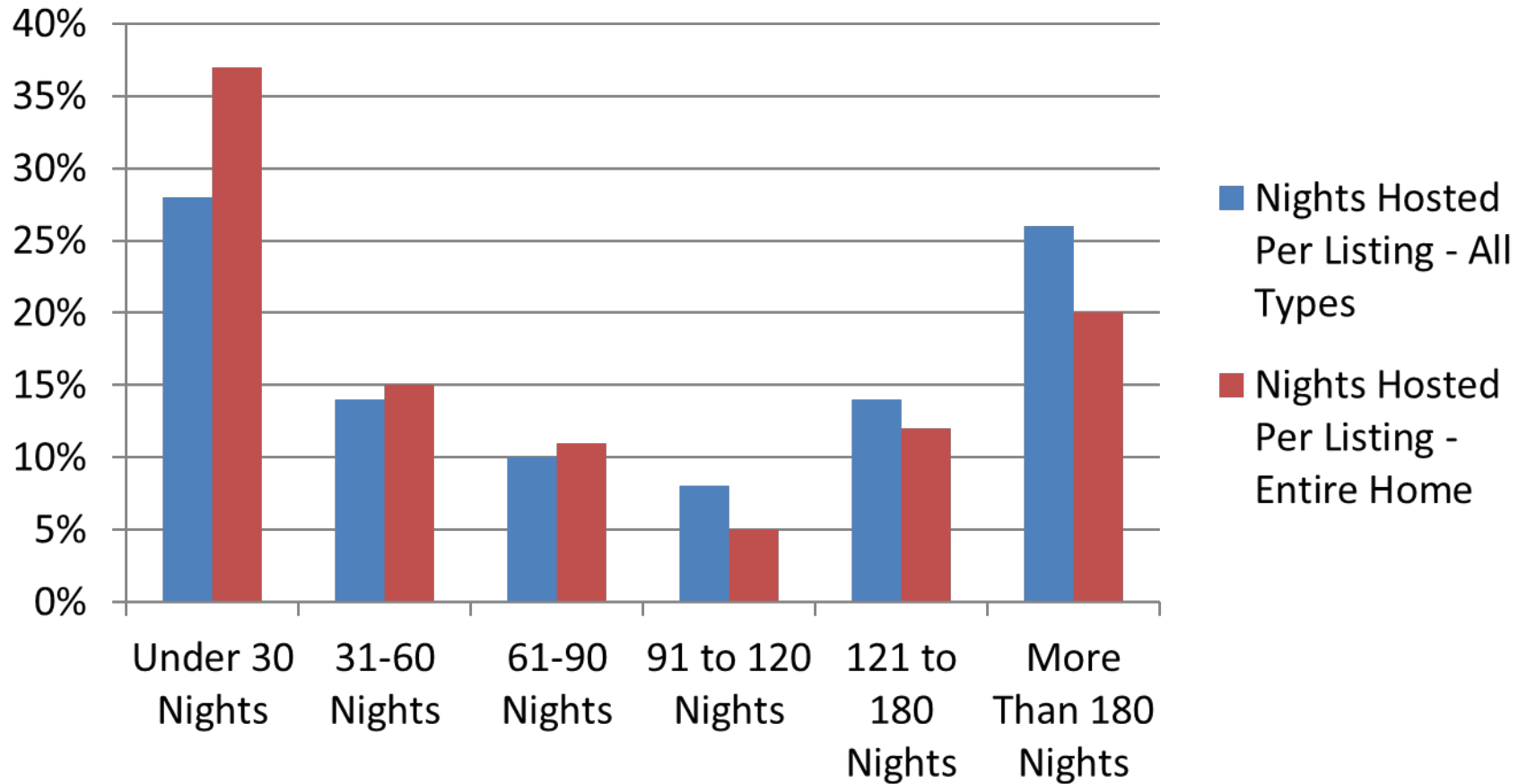
**Somerville had 813 active AirBnB listings in 2017.**



*From Airbnb 2017 data*



# How often are hosts renting?



*From Airbnb 2017 data*



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# Common STR concerns

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- Visitors don't always know (or follow) local rules
- Short-term renters may be less considerate of neighbors
- Increased occupancy can have a negative impact on trash, parking and traffic
- Unregulated STRs are less likely to meet safety codes
- The increase in the number of strangers in a neighborhood can make some feel unsafe
- STRs can reduce the available housing stock for residents



# Potential STR benefits

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- STR income can help residents afford their rent or mortgage
- STRs can promote cultural exchange
- STRs can bring tourism dollars to local businesses
- STRs help address a shortage of overnight options for Somerville visitors
- STRs allow resident without room for guests in their homes to find them overnight options in their own neighborhood



# Our goals with STR policy



- Prevent much-needed housing from being removed from the market and turned into permanent short-term rentals



- Allow homeowners to make extra income and promote citywide economic growth



- Having regulations in place to make sure short-term rentals are safe and that help address potential issues



# Key Policy Questions

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- Should we require that STR owners be Somerville residents?
- If we allow renting entire places as STRs, should we limit how many someone can own in the city?
- Should there be a limit on how many people can stay in one STR at a time?
- Should STR owners be required to provide contact information for an individual who can respond to any issues if/when they are not present during the rental period?
- Should renters be able to rent their apt as an STR? Note that most leases would not allow it without landlord approval.





# Licensing Questions

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- How can we incentivize owners to register their STRs?
- Should we place a cap on the number of STR licenses available for the city?
- Should an STR license be conditional on abiding by all building code regulations?
- Should the city create a separate system for people to file complaints against STR operators?
- Should STR licenses be tied to both the owner and the property such that it would not automatically transfer upon the property sale?



# Survey: A review of five STR Scenarios

Somerville resident offering a private room(s) or a shared room(s) in the place where they live in

- Allow
- Don't allow
- Allow with conditions

Somerville resident offering a separate entire dwelling than the one where they live in the same building

- Allow
- Don't allow
- Allow with conditions

Somerville resident offering their entire place when they are away

- Allow
- Don't allow
- Allow with conditions

Somerville resident living in West Somerville offering an entire place in East Somerville (for example)

- Allow
- Don't allow
- Allow with conditions

A resident of some other city offering an entire place in Somerville that they do not live in.

- Allow
- Don't allow
- Allow with conditions

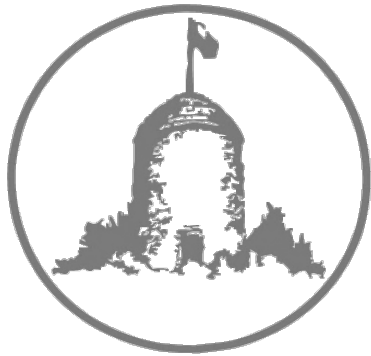


# Survey: A review of five STR Scenarios

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1. If you answered “allow with conditions” for any scenario, what conditions do you suggest?
2. Do you have other general concerns about STRs?
3. What do you like about STRs and the value they can bring?





# City of Somerville Planning Division

## Thank you for attending!

We will now break into groups to discuss the questions we just reviewed and fill out a survey on how you feel about short-term rentals.

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