

Dear Members of the Hamilton City Council,

I am writing to express my concern about Hamilton Council's consideration of limiting measures on short-term rentals. The measures come at a time when we are navigating ever-increasing interest rates and the high cost of living. As a result of STRs, we are able to survive economic pressures.

I am a relatively newly arrived immigrant who has made Hamilton home since stepping into Canada for the first time in 2019. I have fallen in love with the city and its people and I have become an unpaid marketer for the City. I remember meeting Councillor Esther Paul during her campaign visit and stating how I look forward to being active in the next election cycle.

My story of transiting from tenant to homeowner in Hamilton is one that speaks to the possibilities and potential of enterprise in Hamilton. I speak for a lot of budding immigrant families like myself when I state STR has provided a viable means of translating into home ownership with more confidence.

When I contemplated renting out my basement unit, I read with dismay the various horrid stories of landlords with several months of unpaid rent owed by tenants. I also read about the huge backlog of cases with the Landlord and Tenant Board. It became clear I was not willing to take a huge risk with long-term rent and so I took the STR option which has given me a lot more peace of mind. I do think it is imperative to underscore how many of us got into renting on Airbnb because of a system that has become largely ineffective in promptly protecting people who should offer long-term rent.

As a member of the visible minority group, a sizable number of my STR guests look like me and are just landing to begin their Canadian dream. I have found it a fulfilling part of my experience hosting this group of people, helping provide information, directions, and quick tips to help smooth their journeys. There are short decks I provide with information on multifamily residential rental firms that cater to immigrants in Hamilton, the closest Service Canada mall, immigrant-friendly banks, where to buy products at the cheapest price in the area, etc. This is a service that has helped at least 10 families settle in Hamilton and some have progressed from guests to becoming close family friends. I have a growing group of STR hosts that are now more than acquaintances. When we connect, we share very similar sentiments.

I provide value that many Hotels, Motels, and B&Bs cannot; I advocate for this city so much you'd think I was running for Mayor. If the City pushes ahead with this policy as it is, you will be losing this valuable service from a lot of hosts. I have lots of return guests, students settling into Macmaster and Mohawk College, Healthcare workers in training, young couples immigrating, and Manufacturing and construction workers on out-of-station postings who have made my basement their home. These people are on their journeys but quite a lot of them are here to make our city a lot better.

I have never had a guest host a party. I have not had noise complaints on my property, and I have not had any parking issues with a neighbor. However, I would have to suffer for the offenses of hosts who may not be as invested in the City.

I do believe that a blanket hammering of this policy and not creating a clear path for dutiful and committed homeowners to work together with the City to responsibly host the myriads of dynamic guests Hamilton receives is draconian.

For a secondary property, the homeowner's proven ability to monitor it should take precedence over this outright ban. In my opinion, STR hosts, such as me, would rather opt for agreed punitive measures when there are valid complaints. This could include suspension or revocation of licenses for repeat complaints. I agree that secondary homeowners should show responsibility but taking away their choice of short- or long-term rental is myopic and far-reaching.

If secondary homeowners rent out their units at current interest rates it won't be at a price point that will be affordable for most. Realistically speaking, this becomes the case. All over the world, we know the real help to the housing deficit is by making support available to build mega multi-family units and condo projects designed with low-income earners in mind. I know the City is embarking on many of these, but the expected inventory of 600 units from current STRs will only be available for the affluent rental market. These are not people who need help. The Toronto case study shows this, it has not impacted rental costs in any way.

As an Airbnb host, I know this. However, I do want the committee to research the benefit Hamilton has had from the implementation of the By-law in Toronto. From my experience, I get guests who are en route to other provinces but cannot get a place to stay in Toronto. They decide to come to Hamilton and end up exploring our city and improving our local economy in the process. I had a guest who was Saskatchewan bound as a Provincial nominee and who informed me that she would be returning to Hamilton once her mandatory stay is over. We will end up passing this benefit on to other more open neighboring cities

I also believe the 120 days cap in the proposed amendment by-law serves only to drive the final nail to the coffin for the brief reprieve we enjoy in a difficult time. We may as well ban STRs altogether.

My firm belief is that we can address excesses, set controls, and still go about licensing hosts who have shown a track record of properly managing their STR units without these far-reaching restrictions.

I appreciate you taking my comments into consideration. I would be happy to discuss this matter further with any one of you.

Sincerely,
Toni Daramola