

06/05/2019

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Sebrina Whetzel. My husband and I are adjacent property owners to the home on 422 Cedar Street, Harrisonburg VA, which is currently being considered for a short-term rental permit. I am writing you as a concerned citizen of Harrisonburg, and mother of one, in regards to this short-term rental permit. I recognize that safety was an important foundation in establishing Harrisonburg as "The Friendly City," and is a vital key to keeping it that way. Feeling safe is what has kept our family in our home for the past 9 years.

It is important to note for the public interest and for the safety and wellbeing for our family that per Airbnb, they do not routinely perform background checks on their paying guests. They do note that they reserve the right to do so; however, only the paying guest is subject to this disclosure, which leaves the potential for guests that have a criminal background, including sexual offenses, to make use of the rental property.

Per the Virginia sex offender website, some sex offenders are not permitted to live within 500 feet of a public park or in an area that has high traffic to school-related activities. As you may be aware, the Hillendale Park entrance is less than 500 feet from the Cedar Street property, and hosts a variety of school and sports functions for school-aged children. In fact, when we moved into our home, we felt that living less than 500 feet from a public park was an added safety feature for the sake of raising a child. Allowing the short-term rental permit for this property would reduce my confidence in the safety of our immediate area due to the lack of regulation of guests.

In addition to this concern, the property owner informed us that they are not residing in the residence. The property owners have leased their upstairs and downstairs suite via Airbnb beginning in August of 2018. We have unfortunately witnessed the effect of the rotating renters without a routine tenant in a couple of ways. First, the overgrowth of brush outside has caused an obstruction of view when leaving our driveway so much that my husband and I have been partially mowing to keep us safe when leaving our residence. Second, our personal property was removed from our residence, potentially by a guest of the rental. This violation of personal property, in turn, has led us to obtain costly security cameras in an area that previously felt safe. Lastly, a guest's car has entirely obstructed my driveway causing me not to be able to leave my home until the car was moved. This makes me wonder if the entire house is booked at full capacity (potentially up to 11 accommodation spaces per the Airbnb listing), if there is enough parking to allow for both the upstairs and downstairs renters to park safely off the street. I also wonder if all Virginia uniform statewide building code and fire prevention codes allow up to 11 accommodation spaces in a home estimated at 2,000 SF.

The last area of concern we have is for property value in our neighborhood. It is our understanding that short-term rentals decrease the value of surrounding homes. With the value of homes increasing all over Harrisonburg in the current market, we wonder if this would come to a standstill or even begin decreasing in our area if this and other short-term rental accommodations become commonplace. This would be unfair to those of us who have resided in and taken care of our community over the last decade and longer.

Thank you for your time and consideration to help keep our home secure by maintaining a residential zone. The effects of rotating renters and absent owners have inconvenienced us since August 2018. We have been hesitant to bring this up as an issue, as we were under the assumption these were family members of our neighbors, not rotating renters. We are available to answer any concerns at appreciate your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

Sebrina Whetzel
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