

The Fourth and Columbia Demand

Approved by Olympia DNA Membership & Executive Board on January 11th, 2019

We speak out now regarding our concerns about Airbnb. **As Downtown residents united, our membership authorized us** at our January 2019 general meeting **to express our displeasure with Airbnb and make concrete policy requests to address those concerns.**

Airbnb, among other miniscule competitors, **on paper offers homeowners and renters the ability to make a couple extra bucks by opening a spare room for the night to a visitor, and the ability to leverage the Internet by blasting that offer to the globe.** Governments have taken to **calling these “short-term rentals.”** While this platform is important in many places, **in our town we have found it has sowed the seeds of a negative impact that if unchecked has disastrous consequences.**

The experience of towns larger than ours is instructive. **The platform that Airbnb offers is available to both the homeowner** renting out a child's former bedroom after graduation **and to a small LLC. Unethically intelligent folks have used that to their advantage.** In Los Angeles, a landlord **successfully evicted all the tenants of his apartment building** and subsequently listed those apartments on Airbnb. **Listing apartments on Airbnb requires availability every day** similar to a hotel, **preventing those apartments from being rented by lease** which removes those apartments from the rental market. **This exacerbates our regional housing shortage, where our town's vacancy rate is around 2 per cent. We spoke about those consequences to you in our Fifth and Washington Declaration,** but will happily restate them upon request.

As neighbors, we've already noticed this. **Today, 123 4th has nearly one floor listed on Airbnb. These are not spare bedrooms** in the two-thousand dollar 2-bedroom apartments, mind you. **These are studios and 1-bedrooms** advertised as spaces for guests' sole use. **We learned this by speaking to the onsite Airbnb manager for 123 4th over the fence.**

Our conundrum is this. **We concede to capitalism property rights,** that our current social contract grants property holders primary rights to do what they may on land they own and maintain *by themselves*. **But when we offer those property holders concessions as a public, we should get some of that back as an acknowledgment of that concession.**

123 4th came to life because of, and still benefits from, the Multifamily Property Tax Credit (MPTC). This property tax credit offers an 8- or 12-year exemption from property taxes for all new buildings over 4 units, the exact amount depending on the explicit admission of low

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income people. **As our City Council, you established our town's MPTC and can govern it accordingly.**

We support the MPTC because it incentivizes building more apartments and more homes. As a neighborhood almost exclusively comprised of renters, we are proud to be self-sufficient in the small spaces we can afford and wish to extend that opportunity to others. Our state legislature created the option of the MPTC, that you implemented, in that same spirit, to open the door for more people to move in. **That spirit did not consider hotels because homes and hotels are separate concepts.**

Airbnb has blurred those concepts by opening the backdoor for apartments to be converted to hotels. If we do not act, we will face the consequences cities greater than ours have faced, such as Seattle, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

The first policy proposal, to us, is clear from the outset. **Our initial proposal is to change policy so that any property in our town benefiting from the MPTC is forbidden from hosting short-term rentals so long as they benefit.** This policy ask does primarily benefit our neighborhood because new apartment construction is focused Downtown. It does not address other concerns about Airbnb outside of Downtown, but those conversations will be complex because they get to the heart of the rights of property owners. **But our initial policy ask does arrest excesses in this situation, sets the tone for our community conversation about Airbnb, and sends a community message that our town will address this as part of our ongoing community conversation about housing.**

As renters and Downtown residents, we will continue speaking out about Airbnb after the conclusion of our initial policy request. Amidst all the challenges our neighborhood faces, we choose to live here because we love our neighborhood, our town, and all who dwell within. Because we love, we care. **If we did not care, we would bounce.** We offer our initial work and experience on this issue as a beacon for our town as all of us continue this conversation we are opening.

We hope we have made our call crystal clear and await your formal response.

Your neighbors,

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