

What is This Discussion of Airbnb About?

Would you want an overnight lodging business operating in your neighborhood? Or worse, right next door? Well, that is precisely what could happen in neighborhoods across the state, if two bills set for a vote in the Tennessee General Assembly are approved. And the worst part is that you and your city government would have no power to stop it.

First, there was flipping. Now, there is Airbnb. Novice and experienced real estate investors, alike, are purchasing homes in the middle of neighborhoods for the sole purpose of renting these “homes” to complete strangers for a few days or weeks at a time. It is not uncommon for such investors to own multiple homes in the same neighborhood or elsewhere in the city. This practice is good for the investor and the visitor but can be very bad for the homeowners residing in the neighborhood.

Here’s how it works. A real estate investor or group of investors buys a home in a desirable, convenient location. They paint the walls, tidy up a bit and then post pictures of the place on an online site such as Airbnb and VRBO that connect property owners with travelers interesting in obtaining overnight lodging accommodations. These investors offer the use of their “home” as an alternative to area hotels for an advertised fee. And that’s how the house next door or across the street becomes a hotel. Each week new guests arrive. Or, if no one rents the home, then it sits unoccupied.

While many visitors renting such properties for a weekend getaway or week-long visit are respectful of the property and the neighborhood, there are no guarantees. Even if the guests are respectful and quiet, surrounding owners are uncomfortable about a steady stream of strangers right next door. On those occasions when the guests next door are not a quiet, respectful family, then even more troubling and problematic issues can arise.

You might be thinking, I’ve heard of Airbnb, but we don’t have any in my neighborhood. If so, you might be tempted to ignore this. DON’T! In all likelihood, the reason your neighborhood is not home to such properties is that local zoning laws prevent this from occurring. Most cities prohibit commercial activities like auto repair, dry cleaners, restaurants, dog kennels, and hotels from operating in a residential neighborhood. However, if these bills are approved by the Tennessee General Assembly, this will change. If these bills pass, your local zoning protections would be overridden by the State and cities across the state would be required to allow AirBnbs to operate in residential neighborhoods. There would be no separate vote in your community. The city council would be powerless to prevent it. It just happens. Game over.

If this concerns you and you want control of your neighborhood, then contact the state senators and representatives listed below immediately and tell them to vote against the Airbnb bills and to leave decisions about local neighborhoods to the homeowners and their elected city officials. Contact them before it is too late. **The vote is Tuesday, March 7.**

OPPOSE Senate Bill 1086 / House Bill 1020 and Senate Bill 372 / House Bill 497

Leave zoning decisions to the local communities and let local residents decide whether they want AirBnbs operating in their residential neighborhood.