



## MEMO

TO: Mayor Dolan & Sandy City Council  
FROM: Mike Coulam, Community Development Director  
DATE: March 16, 2017  
SUBJECT: INTERESTING ARTICLE ABOUT REGULATING AIRBNBS

This opinion piece appeared in the latest issue of Planning Magazine. Thought it was worth sharing, given our own legislative efforts this past legislative session on this topic and the suggestion by Chris McCandless and Mayor Dolan to look into regulating Airbnb in Sandy.

### Viewpoint

#### What to Do About Airbnb

By Ulrik Binzer

The dramatic rise of Airbnb and other short-term rental and home-sharing websites has rightly caused cities across the country to turn to regulation to mitigate negative side effects like noise, trash, parking, and traffic, as well as more serious issues like impacts on affordable housing and neighborhood character.

Unfortunately, enforcing such rules using traditional code enforcement techniques has proven challenging. Identifying illegal rentals is difficult and time-consuming, and with no easy way to verify rental activity, cities struggle to make sure owners play by the rules and pay their fair share of lodging and hotel taxes. Even more unfortunate, many cities are enacting blanket bans to supposedly "avoid" these difficulties.

To ban or not to ban Airbnb is the wrong question. Last year, my hometown of Tiburon, California, debated exactly that. Proponents of a ban wanted to protect the town's character, fearing it would draw bachelor parties or spring breakers. Those against it argued that those fears were baseless and that increased tourism benefited residents and the local economy.

As a close follower and contributor to the debate, I soon found myself on a committee appointed to study possible ways to regulate these types of rentals and propose a plan for enforcement. As a long-term Airbnb user and host myself — I'd been renting my house out for years whenever my family vacationed — I was familiar with the many benefits of these services. But as a home owner in a residential neighborhood, I fully appreciated neighbors' concerns about noisy and disruptive short-term rentals.

I spent countless hours researching how other municipalities approached this issue, and found that banning short-term rentals is an extremely unrealistic and shortsighted strategy. Unrealistic because the convenience, comfort, and low cost of home sharing can't be ignored; hosts will simply hide their activities. Shortsighted because, with proper regulation and enforcement, citizens and communities can benefit from the increased tourism and tax dollars as opposed to diverting resources away from other priorities to enforce all-out bans.

There is a better way. Instead of bans, cities can enact innovative, enforceable policies that address the negative consequences of short-term rentals while maximizing economic and community benefits. Cities like Denver, Los Angeles, and Vancouver, British Columbia, are doing just that. While the specifics vary, the underlying idea is the same: Explicitly identify the unwanted behaviors and negative consequences of short-term rentals, and devise specific, practical policies to mitigate them.

With the advancements in big-data technology it is now possible to enforce such policies, and identify addresses of short-term rentals to bring them into compliance with local rules. Dozens of municipalities including Truckee, California; Durango, Colorado; Asheville, North Carolina; and Islamorada, Florida, already use such tools and have seen double-digit improvements in compliance and revenue. This allows these cities and counties to double down on enforcement to further ensure that short-term rental operators stay within the designated zones, pay their fair share of taxes, and are accountable and respectful of neighbors.

Planners and local communities need to reframe the Airbnb conversation. Instead of "to ban or not to ban?" we should be asking how our communities can reap the many benefits of home sharing while at the same time ensuring that everyone acts in a responsible and neighborly way. The regulatory and enforcement best practices are out there. Let's use them and come up with short-term rental policies that actually work.

*Ulrik Binzer is the founder and CEO of Host Compliance, a tech company that has pioneered tools to help cities implement, monitor, and enforce short-term rental ordinances. (For more on Airbnb, read, "Could You Bnb My Neighbor" at [www.planning.org/planning/2016/feb/bnb.htm](http://www.planning.org/planning/2016/feb/bnb.htm).)*