

Short-Term Rental Focus Of Hearing

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HARRISONBURG — Council will hold a public hearing Tuesday to consider amending how short-term rentals can legally operate within city limits.

According to city documents, proposed changes would include changing the definition of “bed and breakfast facilities” to “short term rental” and allow minimal off-street parking requirements for short-term rentals.

Short-term rentals would include bed-and-breakfasts, hostels and residences like those offered for rent through airbnb.com.

The proposed changes to short-term rental regulations would allow guests to stay in a lodging area for up to 14 consecutive days, and rentals would have to provide a parking space for each guest room.

Permit Would Be Required

Owners of short-term rentals would be required to obtain a special-use permit to operate, have a business license and go through an inspection. In the March 14 Planning Commission meeting, Adam Fletcher, the city’s director of planning and community development, said he wants to keep Harrisonburg as affordable as possible.

“The issue bigger municipalities are running into is where people are buying properties, they renovate the space and they turn it into an airbnb only,” he said. “When the whole house is rented, they are never there and the cost of living then skyrockets in that block because people cannot afford to buy the unit or the house because they are being rented on the short-term basis. The Planning Commission recommended the amendments on Aug. 8 by a 6-0 vote. During an online discussion in April, real estate agent Ritchie Vaughan said having short-term rentals “makes really good economic sense in our area.” “We do not want our city to have enough hotel rooms to accommodate peak demand weekends... because these excess rooms will then stay vacant the remaining 355 days per year that don’t have a huge vacation demand,” Vaughan said in the discussion. Staff believes by making these amendments, it will provide opportunities to allow property owners and occupants to rent dwellings on a transient basis with minimal negative impact to the community.

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