



CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

To: Cambridge City Council
From: Councillor Patricia Nolan
Date: July 24, 2026
Subject: Proposed Amendments to Short Term Rental Zoning Petition

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Unfortunately I am not able to attend the [Ordinance Committee](#) meeting scheduled for Wednesday, August 19, 2026 to discuss a Zoning Petition by the Cambridge City Council, to consider amendments to the Short-Term Rental Ordinance. I would like to submit my thoughts on the petition in writing so the entire committee can consider the petition in full.

Summary of Process:

For several years I have worked to understand local issues with the Short-Term Rental Ordinance and the enforcement thereof. The City began permitting short term rentals via the Short Term Rentals Ordinance in 2017 and had not comprehensively reviewed impacts since then. In 2023 I worked to start that review, filing [POR 2023 #155](#) and [POR 2024 #120](#), to which the City Manager responded with [CMA 2024 #224](#) and [CMA 2025 #176](#). In [August 2025](#), the Inspectional Services Department (ISD), in coordination with the Law Department, identified 635 short-term rental units in the City and only 175 registered short-term rental units, indicating a large majority of illegal short-term rental units. Between this reporting and working with local residents to identify loopholes and concerns, I worked with other councillors, the Law Department, and ISD to develop a process for updating the ordinance. We then worked to engage with short-term rental operators, neighbors, and stakeholders to find solutions that better allow the City of Cambridge to ensure the public good is being served by the Ordinance. As part of the process to come up with recommended changes, ISD conducted a public survey to inform this proposal, and I believe the language put forward by the Law Department is a step forward and responsive to the needs of the community. As indicated in the reporting from October 2024 and August 2025, enforcement of the existing Short-Term Rental Ordinance is difficult and ISD, after substantial outreach to registered short-term rental operators and the general public, has recommended changes that will provide for a more effective regulatory process for short term rentals in the city.

Suggested Changes:

I do believe one change is needed. I will propose having a 90-day annual limit apply only for Autonomous Unit Short-Term Rentals, which is the category of rentals that allow a property owner to rent out their entire primary residence for up to less than one month at a time. The 90-day annual limit ensures that residents renting their primary residence actually live there. I propose striking the 90-day annual limit for Operator-Occupied Short-Term Rental and Owner-Adjacent Short-Term Rental categories. Short-term rentals can and should be a healthy part of the housing ecosystem in Cambridge. They provide short term

accommodations for visitors, students, professors, and even prospective residents. Residents who operate STRs in their homes are part of our community and local economy, and as long as they are operating within the regulations set by our Short-Term Rentals Ordinance, I see no reason to unnecessarily limit the daily limit. I would retain the 90-day limit for Autonomous Unit Short-Term Rentals to better enforce residency requirements that already exist in the Ordinance.

With the proposed draft and these changes, the City can better enforce existing STR regulations and support existing operators who are fully compliant with Cambridge's STR ordinance requirements. With actual enforcement, the hundreds of illegal STRs operating today should become available as long term rentals and provide needed units of housing.

Proposed Amendment Language:

4.62 c. *Primary Residence*. A residential unit in which an Operator resides for at least nine months out of a twelve-month period in a calendar year.

4.62 g. *Short-Term Rental*. Any rental of a residential unit including any rental of a bedroom within a unit, in exchange for payment, as residential accommodations for a duration of less than twenty eight (28) consecutive days. ~~A short-term rental may be permitted to rent for not more than ninety (90) calendar days per calendar year.~~ The following types of short-term rental are permitted by this Section ~~and may be offered up to ninety (90) calendar days per calendar year:~~

- (1) Autonomous Unit Short-Term Rental. The short-term rental is the Operator's Primary Residence and the residence is being offered in its entirety. During the period of the rental, the Operator is not residing in said unit. A short-term rental of this type may be permitted to rent for not more than ninety (90) calendar days per calendar year.
- (2) Operator-Occupied Short-Term Rental. The short-term rental of at least one but no more three (3) individual bedrooms within the primary residence of its Operator. One bedroom must be reserved for the Operator. The Operator must be present for the duration of the short-term rental.
- (3) Owner-Adjacent Short-Term Rental. The short-term rental of a residential unit in its entirety that is not the primary residence of the Operator, but is located within a residential building with a total of four or fewer units where all units in the building are owned by the Operator, and one of the units in the building is the primary residence of the Operator. An owner-adjacent short-term rental may be rented only as a whole unit to one party of short-term renters at any one time. An owner-adjacent short-term rental may not be rented as separate bedrooms to separate parties.

4.62 h. *Short-Term Rental Operator*. The person or persons offering a residential unit or bedroom for short-term rental, who may be either the owner or the primary leaseholder of the unit with the written permission of the property owner and the condominium association if applicable. A short-term rental Operator operating an Autonomous Unit Short Term Rental may be permitted to rent their short-term rental for not more than ninety (90) calendar days per calendar year.

I intend to forward this communication to the Ordinance Committee meeting on August 19, 2026 for discussion, and I look forward to discussing the proposed amendments with you all at a future City Council meeting.

Sincerely,

Patricia Nolan

Cambridge City Council