

Great neighborhoods don't just happen.

Residential districts may be zoned by the city, but citizens are their lifeblood. Whether it is a block party, neighborhood watch or sprucing up the parkway, the commitment of full-time residents is the heart of a community. Their investment is 365 days a year.

And that is why we, as stakeholders in our neighborhoods, oppose the proposed Airbnb ordinance currently before the Chicago City Council. In a weak attempt at regulation, the ordinance allows vacation rentals unlimited proliferation that could destroy the neighborhoods we love and maintain.

Over the past five years, thousands of short term rentals have emerged in Chicago, changing the social dynamic of their surroundings by replacing taxpayers with occasional visitors or otherwise empty housing. The ordinance will not limit the number of vacation rentals in an area, and allows no review mechanism by the people – the neighbors – who apparently make these streets worth visiting.

One example is Cedar Street in the Gold Coast, a street dominated by four vacation rental buildings. Weekends bring incessant loud parties, heavy traffic, and a trashed neighborhood feel.

This ordinance is a terrible policy in a time of rising rents and soaring property taxes. By taking housing off the market for tourists' use, Airbnb makes it harder to find affordable homes, both rental and owned. And though vacation rentals are clearly commercial, Airbnb owners are taxed at the lower homeowners' tax rate, not the business rate. In other words, the City would have residents subsidize a commercial use in their midst. And, vacation rentals can operate in our community 90 nights per year before they even register to pay those taxes. Unlike when a bar operates without a license or a car has no permit parking sticker, there is no effective way to enforce this law. We think the proposed ordinance sounds like a great deal – for Airbnb.

This trend, left unchecked, won't increase housing values. Any real estate agent will confirm that residences next to vacation rentals lose value because of the constant tourist presence and disruption to the immediate area. That's why it's called a neighborhood, not a touristhood.

But the tide is turning against under-regulated Airbnbs. Berlin, Germany and Austin, Texas, are just two cities hit hard by its expansion and just approved measures to control growth. Why is Chicago so lax on an industry that can literally change the face of our neighborhood without our input?

We work hard to make our neighborhoods great. This ordinance seems to work directly against our investment. Let's not let bad things happen to great neighborhoods.

Jane Lenkman

*President, Gold Coast Neighbors Association*

Also signed by

Justin Moore

*President, Wrightwood Neighbors Association*

Reatha Kay

*President, RANCH Triangle Association*

David Lewin

*Vice-President, Streeterville Organization of Active Residents*

Peg Callard

*President, North Dearborn Association*

Kenneth Dotson,

*President, Lincoln Central Association*

Malcolm Lambe

*President, Sheffield Neighborhood Association*

Sandra Matson

*President, Park West Community Association*