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Region of Queens Land Use Planning Update Short-Term Rentals and Visitor Accommodations

Background Report (3/7)

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Short-Term Rentals and Visitor
Accommodations

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Region of Queens Land Use Planning
Update

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INTRODUCTION

Topic Overview

Accommodations for visitors play an important role in supporting Queens' local economy.

Seeing as the municipality is a popular vacation destination, accommodations for tourists has become a strong and profitable market. As a result, Queens offers a range of lodging options, including larger hotels in the Liverpool area as well as a mix of inns, motels, bed and breakfasts, resorts, and cottage rentals distributed throughout rural communities.

In recent years, the accommodation sector has changed significantly with the growth of short-term rentals, typically defined as the rental of a home or room for less than 28 consecutive days. While seasonal cottage rentals and informal visitor accommodations have long been part of Queens' tourism landscape, the rise of online booking platforms, such as Airbnb and VRBO, has made short-term rentals more accessible and popular, leading to a substantial increase in their number across the municipality. Short-term rentals can provide benefits to both residents and visitors. They

offer homeowners an additional source of income and greater flexibility in how they use their properties, while also expanding accommodation options for tourists. This can be particularly valuable in smaller communities where visitor demand may not be sufficient to support traditional hotels, motels, or inns.

At the same time, the increasing prevalence of short-term rentals has raised important planning considerations. In some cases, homes that might otherwise be available for long-term residents are used as visitor accommodations instead, reducing the supply of rental housing. There are also questions about how short-term rentals fit within residential neighbourhoods and what impact they may have on neighbourhood character and the day-to-day experience of nearby residents.

Why is this a Topic of Focus?

Since the adoption of the planning documents, there have been requests to amend the Municipal Planning

Strategy and Land Use Bylaw to provide greater flexibility for visitor accommodations. These generally involve requests for zoning changes or development agreements to allow for multiple accommodation units on one property, such as for "glamping" (glamorous camping) businesses. The frequency of these requests reflects the important role that tourism plays in Queens and the strong demand for visitor accommodations throughout the municipality.

However, residents have also raised concerns about the potential impacts of short-term rentals on nearby properties and communities, including issues related to noise and neighbourhood character. These two opposite issues have raised important questions about whether more visitor accommodations should be permitted in some areas, and whether more restrictions are necessary in others. This review is an opportunity to ensure the regulatory framework strikes the appropriate balance between supporting tourism and protecting the character and livability of neighbourhoods.

Existing Policies and Regulations

The current planning documents generally take a moderately-cautious approach to regulating short-term rentals and other visitor accommodations. This approach recognizes the important role that tourism plays in the local economy while also acknowledging the potential impacts that these uses can have on housing availability and neighbouring properties.

The Land Use Bylaw regulates visitor accommodations through two categories: Short-Term Rentals and Fixed-Roof Overnight Accommodations.

Short-Term Rentals

A Short-Term Rental is defined as a fixed-roof overnight accommodation where guest sleeping facilities are contained within a single building and rented to only one party at a time. Short-term rentals are permitted in all residential, hamlet, and rural zones, as well as in the Commercial Mixed (CM) Zone. To help maintain the residential character of neighbourhoods and limit the concentration of

these uses, only one short-term rental is permitted on a lot. Short-term rentals may also be located within accessory dwelling units. In addition, one parking space is required for each rental unit.

Fixed-Roof Overnight Accommodations

A Fixed-Roof Overnight Accommodation is defined more broadly as a building, multiple buildings on the same lot, or part of a building that provides overnight accommodations to the traveling public for gain or profit. These uses may include hotels, motels, hostels, cottage or cabin rentals, inns, and short-term house or apartment rentals. Fixed-roof overnight accommodations are generally permitted in zones where commercial and tourism-related uses are the primary intent, including:

- + Downtown Commercial (CD),
- + General Commercial (CG),
- + Local Commercial (CL),
- + Hamlet Commercial (HC),
- + Destination Resort (DR) Zones,
- + Resort (Re) Zone, and

- + may be considered through a Development Agreement in the Seasonal Residential (SR) Zone.

Overall, the current framework directs larger-scale visitor accommodations toward commercial and tourism-oriented areas while permitting a limited number of short-term rentals within residential, hamlet, and rural zones. This reflects an effort to support tourism and economic development while managing potential impacts on housing and established communities.

Tourist Accommodations Registration Act

The Province of Nova Scotia recently (2022) created regulations under the Tourism Accommodations Registration Act that require all visitor accommodations to get a license. This includes short-term rentals. One of the key criteria for licensing is compliance with municipal bylaws.

Expand Opportunities for Fixed-Roof Overnight Accommodations in Rural Areas

One option would be to permit Fixed-Roof Overnight Accommodations in additional rural zones through a Development Agreement process. This could apply to zones such as Inland Rural (R5), Coastal Rural (R6), and Hamlet Residential (HR), where these uses are currently not permitted.

A Development Agreement process would allow each proposal to be reviewed on a site-specific basis, with consideration given to factors such as traffic, access, parking, buffering, environmental impacts, and compatibility with neighbouring properties.

This could help support tourism and economic development in rural areas while maintaining municipal oversight of individual proposals.

Differentiate Between Owner-Occupied and Non-Owner-Occupied Rentals

Some municipalities, like the Halifax Regional Municipality, regulate short-term rentals differently depending on whether the owner lives on the property.

Under this approach, owner-occupied short-term rentals (such as renting a room, secondary suite, or accessory dwelling) could be more broadly permitted, while entire-home rentals where the owner is not present could face additional restrictions or require approval through a Development Agreement process.

This option aims to support residents seeking supplemental income while reducing concerns about residential properties functioning primarily as tourist accommodations.

Prohibit Short-Term Rentals in Certain Areas

Some areas of the municipality may not be suitable for short-term rentals due to the potential for conflict with surrounding activities.

The Land Use Bylaw could be updated to prohibit short-term rentals in certain zones.

Create Tourism Accommodation Areas or Overlay Zones

Another option would be to identify specific areas where additional tourism accommodations are encouraged due to their proximity to attractions, waterfronts, recreational destinations, or established tourism corridors.

Within these areas, additional short-term rentals or Fixed-Roof Overnight Accommodations could be permitted, while regulations in other areas would remain unchanged.

This approach would direct tourism-related development toward locations where it may be most appropriate and beneficial while limiting impacts in areas where residential uses are the primary focus.



KEY QUESTIONS

Questions to Consider

As the Municipality reviews its approach to short-term rentals and visitor accommodations, community input will help determine how best to balance tourism opportunities with housing needs and community well-being. The following questions are intended to encourage discussion and gather feedback from residents, property owners, and business operators:

- + Have you experienced positive or negative impacts from short-term rentals in your community? If so, what were they?
- + Are there particular areas of Queens where additional tourism accommodations should be encouraged? Are there areas where they should be limited?
- + Should the Municipality permit more than one short-term rental on a property in certain circumstances, such as on larger rural lots or in areas with strong tourism demand?
- + Are there other concerns, opportunities, or ideas related to short-term rentals and visitor accommodations that should be considered as part of this review?

