

# CITY OF BETHLEHEM

## Department of Community and Economic Development

### Interoffice Memo

**To:** J. William Reynolds, City Council President  
**From:** Craig B. Hynes, Chief Building Inspector  
**Re:** Proposed Ordinance for short Term Rental Properties

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Attached is a proposed ordinance to provide the registration and safety standards for owners and visitors of short term lodging facilities.

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cc: Robert J. Donchez, Mayor  
William P. Leeson, City Solicitor  
Alicia Miller Karner, Director of Community and Economic Development  
Council Members  
Louise Kelehner, City Clerk  
File

ATTACH

DATE: November 1, 2017

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Building Inspector

BILL NO. \_\_\_\_\_

**ORDINANCE NO.** \_\_\_\_\_

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF BETHLEHEM,  
COUNTIES OF LEHIGH AND NORTHAMPTON,  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, ADDING  
ARTICLE \_\_\_\_\_ OF THE CODIFIED ORDINANCES OF  
THE CITY OF BETHLEHEM TITLED  
“SHORT TERM LODGING FACILITIES”

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BETHLEHEM HEREBY ORDAINS AS FOLLOWS:

**Section 1: Purpose**

It is the purpose of this Ordinance and the policy of the City of Bethlehem, in order to protect and promote the public health, safety and welfare of its citizens, to establish rights and obligations of Owners and Transient visitors to maintain and improve the quality of life around residences throughout the City. There is a greater incidence of disturbances and violations of various Codes of the City which adversely affect the peace and quiet of the neighborhood at residential properties where Owners allow unregulated Transient visitors.

If unregulated, Short Term Lodging Facilities can create negative compatibility impacts in residential neighborhoods, including inappropriate commercialization and disruption of the character of single-family neighborhoods, excessive noise, on-street parking that overwhelms use by local residents, increased risk of inappropriate conduct for which enforcement against transients may be difficult, and accumulation of rubbish and trash.

A parallel purpose of this Ordinance is to ensure safe, healthy and nondiscriminatory housing arrangements for Transient Visitors through a regular licensing and inspection program not hitherto in place for rentals of single family dwellings or portions thereof.

The City Council of the City of Bethlehem declares the following purposes for enacting this Ordinance:

1. to enhance accountability of property owners and transient visitors, minimize the risk of communal disturbances and conflict and violations of various Codes of the City which are capable of repetition but evading review, and otherwise protect and promote the public health, safety and welfare of its citizens;
2. to ensure safe, healthy and nondiscriminatory housing arrangements for Transient Visitors through a regular licensing and inspection program not hitherto in place for rentals of single family dwellings or portions thereof;

3. to minimize negative compatibility impacts from excessive noise, on-street parking that overwhelms use by local residents, increased risk of inappropriate conduct for which enforcement against transients may be difficult, and accumulation of rubbish and trash;
4. to impose corresponding owner licensing arrangements for transient accommodations already in place for other residential regulated rental units.

**Section 2: Definitions**

Board of Appeal: The Board of Appeal identified in Article 150 of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Bethlehem and/or occasionally known as the “Codes Board of Appeals”.

Rent or Rental: an arrangement whereby one or more persons obtain permission to occupy a property or portion thereof, regardless of whether compensation or other consideration is passed by a transient visitor to the owner or an agent of the owner.

Short Term Lodging. The occupancy of a dwelling unit or portion thereof for temporary rental occupancy by transients.

Transient visitor. An occupant of a dwelling unit or sleeping unit for not more than 30 days, unless occupant is related to the Owner as married spouse, parent or child, grandparent or grandchild, or brother or sister.

**Section 3: Restrictions on Transient Rentals; types of Short Term Lodging Facilities**

Unless qualified as a hotel or bed and breakfast home use conducted in accordance with the Zoning Ordinance, Short Term Lodging is prohibited throughout the City of Bethlehem except in the following circumstances:

- A. Specific bedroom accommodation. The owner of an owner-occupied single family dwelling may rent no more than 2 bedrooms to transient visitors for a period of not less than 24 hours and not more than 30 consecutive days. Under this arrangement, the owner must occupy the residence during the stay of the transient visitor.
- B. Entire residential unit accommodation. An owner may rent his/her/their primary residence to transient visitors for a period not to exceed 30 consecutive or nonconsecutive calendar days per year (each year shall be January 1<sup>st</sup> through December 31<sup>st</sup>). Under this type of arrangement, the owner may, but is not required to, remain on the premises during the stay of the transient guests.

**Section 4: Annual License Term, Fee and Occupancy Limit**

- A. Before providing any Short Term Lodging, property owners must obtain and keep current a Short Term Lodging License for each property to be designated as a Short Term

Lodging Facility. Such License shall only be issued if the requirements of this Ordinance are met.

- B. Upon application in such form as may be required by the City Department of Community and Economic Development for a Short Term Lodging License or renewal thereof, each applicant shall pay to the City an annual License and inspection fee in accordance with the Housing Inspection Fee Schedule Resolution. A license for a Short Term Lodging Facility shall not be transferred or sold and will expire upon the conveyance of the property.
- C. Each License will note how many lodgers are permitted for short term rental and require the applicant to submit proof of, and remain in constant compliance with, the following:
  - 1. An accurately-drawn floor plan of the residence showing the number of bedrooms and location of smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors. Floor plans must show details for every level of the residence and any attached structures, and the location of windows and all interior and exterior doorways.
  - 2. In the case of Short Term Lodging where the owner-occupant rents a specific bedroom accommodation, the floor plan must clearly designate bedrooms to be used for Short Term Lodging, which must be located within the principal dwelling unit and not in an accessory building.
  - 3. The requirements of Section 5-Performance Standards of this Ordinance.

**Section 5: Performance Standards**

Any Short Term Lodging arrangement allowed under this Ordinance must meet all of the following standards:

- A. The dwelling shall remain as a SINGLE household residential living unit with common housekeeping, kitchen and laundry facilities.
- B. The current City of Bethlehem Housing Code will determine the maximum occupancy of the Short Term Lodging Facility and, in the case where the owner-occupant rents a specific bedroom accommodation, the number of individuals permitted in the designated bedroom.
- C. Nothing in this housing ordinance shall allow the Licensee to make the Short Term Lodging Facility available for use by a transient visitor or guest for nonresidential purposes, such as, but not limited to, the lease or use of the property as reception space, party space, meeting space or for other similar events open to the transient guests.
- D. A Short Term Lodging Facility shall be either of the types set forth in Section 3 of this Ordinance for the entire duration of the annual License unless a new Short Term Lodging License is obtained and a new license fee is paid. A Facility may not change or mix the type of transient accommodation during a licensed period.

- E. The Short Term Lodging Facility shall not adversely affect the residential character of the neighborhood. Short term rental may not generate noise, vibration, glare, odor or other effects that unreasonably interfere with a person's enjoyment of his or her neighborhood.
- F. The owner shall be responsible for the safety and welfare of all transient visitors and guests, preserving the peace and quiet of the community within which the Short Term Lodging Facility is found from noises or disruptions caused by any transient visitor or guest, and to maintain the property in accordance with all laws, regulations and ordinances, including but not limited to any conduct which would qualify as disruptive conduct within the meaning of Article 1739.01.B of the Codified Ordinances of the City, and promptly report those persons violating the same to the responsible City officers and departments for enforcement purposes.
- G. There shall be an annual inspection, conducted by the City of Bethlehem Bureau of Housing, in accordance with the fee schedule resolution. The owner of the Short Term Lodging Facility is responsible for scheduling the inspection and paying the fee. Failure to do so will result in revocation of the Short Term Lodging license.
- H. The owner of the Short Term Lodging Facility must apply for and keep current with a City of Bethlehem Business Privilege Tax License.
- I. There shall be no physical changes to the premises so that it no longer looks like a single family dwelling, such as constructing a separate entrance for the use of the transient visitor or guest.
- J. The owner of the Short Term Lodging Facility shall submit a Certification of Trash Hauler to the City on an annual basis. The owner of the Short Term Lodging Facility is responsible for trash and recycling removal. Lodgers must be notified of trash and recycling collection days.
- K. With respect to making the property available for use, the owners of the Short Term Lodging Facility shall comply with the anti-discrimination provisions of Article 145 and 1737 of the City of Bethlehem Codified Ordinances.
- L. The owner of the Short Term Lodging Facility must maintain a ledger which details the length of stay of each transient visitor and present same to a City of Bethlehem Code Enforcement officer when requested.

**Section 6: Grounds for Suspension, Revocation or Nonrenewal of License**

- A. General. Aside from seeking fines under Section 8 of this Ordinance, the Code Official may take administrative disciplinary action against an owner that may result in a formal warning, non-renewal, suspension or revocation of the Short Term Lodging Facility License, for violating any provision of this Ordinance that imposes a duty upon the

owner and/or for failing to regulate the breach of duties by Occupants as provided for herein.

B. Definitions of Options to the Code Official.

1. Formal Warning - Formal written notification of at least one violation of this Ordinance. Upon satisfactory compliance with this Ordinance and any conditions imposed by the Code Official and/or the City of Bethlehem, the formal warning shall be removed when the Owner applies for License renewal at a time set by the Code Official or by City of Bethlehem.
2. Suspension - The immediate loss of the privilege to rent the Short Term Lodging Facility for a period of time set by the Code Official not to exceed one year from the date of suspension of the License. The Owner, after the expiration of the suspension period, may apply for License renewal without the need to show cause why the Owner's privilege to apply for a License should be reinstated, provided the Owner has paid a new license fee. Upon suspension, the Owner shall take immediate steps to evict, and disallow any further use by, all Transient Visitors at the Short Term Lodging Facility through the end of the suspension period and any unlicensed period.
3. Revocation - The immediate loss of the privilege to rent the Short Term Lodging Facility for any period of time longer than one year or for a second or subsequent suspension of the license for the same Facility, as may be determined by the Code Official. Upon revocation, the Owner shall take immediate steps to evict, and disallow any further use by, all Transient Visitors at the Short Term Lodging Facility through the end of the suspension period and any unlicensed period.
4. Reinstatement – A Short Term Lodging license shall be reinstated from suspension or revocation if the owner or operator of a Short Term Lodging facility corrects all reason(s) for the suspension or revocation of the Short Term Lodging License and has paid a new license fee and all court penalties, if any, obtained pursuant to Section 8 of this Ordinance.
5. Non-Renewal - The denial of an application for License renewal after expiration of any License term due to the failure of the Owner to comply with the requirements of this Ordinance or failure to correct the conditions for which his or her license was previously suspended or revoked. Unless otherwise prohibited by the suspension or revocation of a Short Term Lodging license, the City will permit the Owner to maintain Transient Visitors in the Premises until the end of the license term but will not accept applications for renewal of the License until a time set by the Code Official or by City of Bethlehem such time not to exceed one year from the renewal date.
6. Other remedies – Nothing in this Ordinance shall limit the right, power or jurisdiction of the City to proceed against the Owner or any transient visitor or guest under any other law, regulation or ordinance

C. Criteria for Applying Sanctions.

a. The Code Official, when applying sanctions, shall consider the following:

- i. The effect of the violation on the health, safety and welfare of the Occupants of the Short Term Lodging Facility and other residents of the Premises.
- ii. The effect of the violation on the neighborhood.
- iii. Whether the Owner has prior violations of this Ordinance and other ordinances of the City or has received notices of violations as provided for in this Ordinance.
- iv. Whether the Owner has been subject to sanctions under this Ordinance.
- v. The action taken by the Owner to remedy the violation and to prevent future violations, including any written plan submitted by the Owner.
- vi. Notwithstanding any past or pending administrative action taken to suspend, revoke, or not renew a license for Short Term Lodging Facility license, upon conviction of a third offense under Section 8 of this Ordinance within any 5-year period, the Owner of the Facility, and his/her successors, heirs and assigns, shall be disqualified from using the property as a Short Term Lodging Facility for a period of 2 years.

D. Reasonable Conditions. In addition to enforcing sanctions as set forth above, the Code Official may impose upon the existing or subsequent licenses reasonable conditions related to fulfilling the purposes of this Ordinance.

E. Search Warrant. Upon a showing of probable cause that a violation of this Ordinance or any other ordinance of the City of Bethlehem has occurred, the Code Official may apply to the Magisterial District Judge having jurisdiction in the City of Bethlehem for a search warrant to enter and inspect the premises.

**Section 7. Procedure for Non-Renewal, Suspension or Revocation of License and Appeal.**

A. Form of Notification. Following a determination by the Code Official that grounds for non-renewal, suspension or revocation of a Short Term Lodging license exist, the Code Official shall notify the Owner of the action to be taken by the Code Official and the reason therefor. Such notification shall be in writing. addressed to the Owner in question, and shall contain the following information:

1. The address and identification of the particular Short Term Lodging Facility affected.
2. A description of the violation which has been found to exist.

3. A statement that the License for said Short Term Lodging Facility shall be either suspended or revoked, or will not be renewed for the next License period. In the case of a suspension or revocation, the notice shall state the date upon which such suspension or revocation will commence, and in the case of a suspension shall also state the duration of said suspension and may extend into a period of license renewal. A revocation shall last through the end of the current license period and may be combined with a period of disqualification for renewal.
  4. A statement that, due to the non-renewal, suspension or revocation (as the case may be), the Owner is prohibited from allowing use of the Facility by Transients.
- B. Delivery of Notification. The Code Official shall post the notice at a conspicuous place at the Short Term Lodging Facility and transmit a copy to the Owner by personal delivery and/or some method documenting delivery thereof through United States Postal Service or a private carrier to the Owner or an adult person in responsible possession of the residence or business of Owner. In the event such personal delivery or documented delivery cannot be accomplished after a reasonable attempt to do so, then the notice may be sent to the Owner at the address stated on the most current License application for the Short Term Lodging Facility in question, by regular first class mail, postage prepaid. If such notice is not returned by the postal authorities within five days of its deposit in the U.S. mail, then it shall be deemed to have been delivered to and received by the addressee on the fifth day following its deposit in the U.S. mail, and all time periods set forth under Section 1 above, shall thereupon be calculated from said fifth day.
- C. Appeals. Any Owner affected by a decision of the Code Official or a notice or order issued by the Code Official shall have the right to appeal to the board of appeals, provided that a written application for appeal is filed within 10 days after the day the decision, notice or order was served. An application for appeal may be made when it is claimed that: the true intent of the Codes or rules legally adopted thereunder have been incorrectly interpreted, the provisions of this code do not fully apply, and/or whether the period of license suspension, revocation and/or nonrenewal was appropriate.

## **Section 8: Penalties**

Any person who shall violate a provision of this Ordinance or shall fail to comply with any of the requirements hereof, or the Building Code of the City, or shall be in violation of an approved plan or directive of the Code Enforcement Officer shall, upon conviction thereof before a Magisterial District Judge of the City of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, be liable to pay the following penalties:



- a. First violation – a fine of \$200.00 or 30 days imprisonment, or both;
- b. Second violation – a fine of \$500.00 or 60 days imprisonment, or both;
- c. Third and each subsequent violation - A fine up to \$1,000.00, or ninety days imprisonment, or both.

**Section 9:** That all Ordinances and parts of Ordinances herewith be, and the same are hereby repealed.

Sponsored by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PASSED finally in Council on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2017

\_\_\_\_\_  
President of Council

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
City Clerk

This Ordinance approved on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2017.

/s/ Robert J. Donchez  
Mayor