

Southampton mulls relaxing short-term rental law for events

The change, if adopted, would allow homeowners to rent out residences for less than two weeks during the U.S. Open golf tournament in June.

Rachelle Blinder | December 4, 2017



Southampton Town officials are looking into relaxing rules for short-term rentals. Photo Credit: Randee Daddona

The Southampton Town Board is considering relaxing restrictions on short-term rentals for some special events as it prepares for the 2018 U.S. Open golf tournament at Shinnecock Hills, an official said.

Recently proposed legislation would allow homeowners to rent out their residences for less than the two-week minimum required by town code. Restrictions would only be lifted during an event for which the town board specifically authorizes a waiver.

Town Supervisor Jay Schneiderman said he plans to lift restrictions only for the U.S. Open, which is expected to draw tens of thousands of visitors when it returns to Shinnecock Hills Golf Club from June 11 to 17. But he said the legislation “may open up a conversation” about other events that could benefit from a temporary change in the rental law.

“It’s really a one-shot relaxation of the code to help create the inventory for an economic opportunity for local residents,” Schneiderman said.

Homeowners would still need to obtain permits to rent out their homes during periods when the restriction is lifted.

The town’s short-term rental restrictions were first implemented in 2007 and limited stays to no less than one month. The limit was reduced to two weeks in 2013.

Judi Desiderio, chief executive of Town & Country Real Estate, said officials recognize they have little control over the use of rental websites such as Airbnb and that there are few hotels in town, despite it being a resort area.

“Where would they go? They’re going to end up on Airbnb anyway,” she said of U.S. Open visitors. “It’s better that [officials] have some governance over the rentals versus having it just be willy nilly.”

Airbnb representatives said about 700 people have rented out their homes in Southampton Town on the site between July 1, 2016, and June 31, 2017. Guests stay an average 3.2 days.

Josh Meltzer, northeast head of public policy at Airbnb, said the company “welcomes common sense regulatory reform that will allow more residents and small businesses to take advantage of the benefits of home sharing.”

“We have worked closely with local officials to develop regulations that work for the community, and look forward to continuing to do so,” Meltzer said in a statement.

Elaine Bodtmann, a resident of the Shinnecock Hills hamlet, said she supports the proposal because local residents would benefit financially. She said rentals did not cause noise or overcrowding issues when the U.S. Open was last played in Southampton Town in 2004, before the town’s rental restrictions were implemented.

“It’s a nice boost for the neighborhood and the area,” she said.

A public hearing on the issue is set for Dec. 12 at Town Hall at 1 p.m.

Under the town’s current rental code:

- Rentals cannot be shorter than two weeks without exception.
- No more than four unrelated people can rent together.
- No more than four cars can be parked outside a rental property between 1 a.m. and 6 a.m.
- Rental permits must be renewed every two years. The standard fee is \$200.
- Violations can lead to fines of between \$150 and \$30,000, and a sentence of up to six months in jail, depending on the number of offenses.