



PARCS UPDATE #100

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Airbnb's in Cottage Communities

1. What's Airbnb?

Airbnb¹ is the registered name of a global company that was founded in 2008, is headquartered in San Francisco and operates in 191 countries, and whose revenue in 2017 was **\$2.6 billion**. Other companies that operate similarly are **HomeAway** and **VRBO** (Vacation Rentals by Owners).

These companies function as an online marketplace that connects people who want to rent out their homes with people who are looking for accommodations in that locale.²

For example, this past winter, my daughter and son-in-law decided that they needed a week-long retreat to a secluded location where they could snow-shoe and then curl up beside a fireplace. They found a cozy cottage advertised on Airbnb and signed up for their winter holiday at Christopher Lake. They reported that the cottage lived up to its listing. It was cozy and the linens were clean. A neighbour brought over the key and showed them around. My kids brought in their own groceries and enjoyed their get-away in a snowy wonderland.

Not all Airbnb experiences are as positive for the users. A recent Instagram report detailed **last minute cancelations** by the renters as being the prime user complaint – where renters get off a plane in a far-away city only to be notified that their reservation has been cancelled by the home owner and the visitors are sent to a different home that does not necessarily live up to the expectations of the original listing.

None-the-less, if Airbnb made 2.6 billion by charging 3% of each listing, this indeed is a phenomenon that is growing in popularity.

2. What might be the implications for residents of cottage communities?

Residents of host communities with Airbnb rental properties report three common problems associated with these rentals:

- 1) **Noise and disturbance** - It's not uncommon for Airbnb sublets to be a source of late-night noise or unusual disturbance in a neighborhood, most often when the "host" is not present. "Many of the renters who use these properties for less than 30 days at a time are on vacation, having parties, or renting the property for an event like a bachelor party or post-game event; whereas they want to let loose and have a good time, the neighbors want their peace and quiet."

On the occasion of our 100th edition of our PARCS UPDATE newsletter, I decided to look at a couple of different topics which I hope will be of interest to our readers in cottage communities.

Please note that our first edition came out in June of 2009 – so that's 100 editions in almost 10 years.

Thanks-you to all our regular readers, especially those who write in with opinions or suggestions for future articles.

¹ The term originated from Air Mattress in a Bed and Breakfast

² Not unlike **Uber** that connects persons wanting a ride with car owners willing to drive, for a price.

- 2) **Parking and Occupancy Concerns** - Another problem with Airbnb sublets is that they can cause crowding issues. Airbnb hosts may overstate their capacity far past the legal limit. The result can be cars parked up and down the street, boats overloaded by partying visitors, or ATVs “dripping with unfamiliar drivers” racing down the streets.
- 3) **Loss of a sense of community** – Cottage communities typically set up social events to build a sense of community between permanent residents and seasonal residents (golf tournaments, meet-n-greet socials, Canada Day family fun day, are examples). It just makes sense, however, that people who are visiting a property **once-only** for a week or weekend aren’t going to have the same regard for neighbors and their properties that someone does who is also a property owner and who visits regularly.

3. What might be the implications for councils of cottage communities?

I first had occasion to consider Airbnb’s and their potential impact on cottage communities a couple of months ago when I received a phone call from the **administrator of one of our resort villages** stating that their council had received a complaint from the owner of the local golf course (which has year-round rental cabins as accommodation for visitors) about the number of Airbnb rentals of privately owned cottages impacting that business.

The administrator asked whether any other resort villages had reported any Airbnb rentals and, if so, any complaints about said usage. I replied that I had not heard this issue raised by any of our readers, but that I would put out a call for cottage communities to write in **and tell us whether Airbnb rentals are happening in their community and, if so, their impact on the community.**

As I pondered that phone call, I was of the opinion that should a resort village seek to regulate Airbnb business in their community, it would likely have to happen by way of changes to their **Official Community Plan and Zoning Bylaw**. That reflection took me to the website of my own community, the Resort Village of Mistusinne, where I turned to the **bylaw page** to consult **our OCP and Zoning Bylaw** and found the following:

3.2 SPECIAL PROVISIONS

3.2.1 Bed and Breakfast Lodging - Council may establish standards limiting any accessory activities as a condition of issuing a DISCRETIONARY USE permit. Where Bed and Breakfast lodging is allowed as a DISCRETIONARY USE in the Residential District, it shall be: a) Located in, and ancillary to, a single detached dwelling used as the operator’s principal residence, b) Licensed pursuant to The Public Health Act and The Public Accommodation Regulations and meet the requirements of the Fire Commissioner, c) Limited to a maximum of two thirds of the number of bedrooms for guest bedrooms, d) Permitted a maximum of one (1) off-street parking space for each lodging room, e) Allowed to provide one non-illuminated window or wall sign having a maximum facial area of 2 square feet (0.19 square meters) advertising the bed and breakfast lodging.

This Zoning Bylaw was adopted 10 years ago, in 2009. The writers at that time certainly had no concept of a bed-and-breakfast being part of a global reservation system. Yet, I was gratified to see that the provision was there. Certainly this section of the Zoning Bylaw already limits the scope of a rental. Should our council one-day feel the need to further limit or dictate the provisions for private cottage owners listing their cottages as Airbnb’s, our council has only to build those amendments into this existing document. It’s great to have a constitution for our community!

Hope to hear your thoughts about Airbnb’s in cottage communities.

Let's conclude with a sobering photo



This photo shows all that is left from a fire last month in a lovely cottage that was located in the RV of Mistusinne.

The volunteer fire fighters in the RV were on hand within a couple of minutes, but . . .

This is the 5th cottage that has been lost or severely damaged due to fire since the village was established about 45 years ago.

This fire was caused by the owner trying to thaw out a frozen water line with a blow torch, two others were caused by chimney fires, one other was a 'mystery fire' that allegedly started outdoors, and the 5th one was, I believe, an electrical short.

If a fire were to break out today, in May, when our irrigation system is up and running, we might have had a chance to put it out. From May to September, the resort village pumps water from the lake to a stand-pipe behind each residential lot. This non-potable water is for use in irrigating our property and, of course, for fire-fighting. In our community, residents' potable water come either from a private well on their own property or from a cistern which is filled with potable water hauled from a neighbouring community. Pumping from a well or cistern is not workable when the supply may be limited or the pump-room may be on fire.

But without running water, in early spring, our firetruck was too slow because it had to keep returning to the village pump station, to keep filling up. The resort village has a use of works agreement with the Village of Elbow, 8.8 km away. Those trucks from Elbow, along with other from Loreburn and Davidson were on the scene; but they arrived too late. However, the presence of our own firetruck and or own volunteers was credited with having prevented the fire from spreading to neighbouring properties.

Volunteers took in the couple who were left homeless, at midnight – and helped them relocate to nearby furnished rental property, the next day. The couple saved nothing from inside their cottage home.

What provisions does your cottage community make for fighting fires? Do you feel that you are adequately protected? Are cottage communities especially vulnerable? Please email your thoughts?