

City Talk Column for June 26, 2024
City Clerk's Office
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An STR Permitting update: halfway through the program's second year

The City entered the second year of its short-term rental (STR) permitting program in January 2024. Permit compliance is currently at 97%, with 1121 permitted properties. 17.1% of Sedona's housing stock are STRs, which is more or less where it's sat all year so far. In 2024, there has been a steady trickle of already permitted properties changing ownership, more so than new properties starting to rent for the first time. I presented a STR program update to City Council during the May 28, 2024, meeting in item 8.c., which gave a detailed explanation of how the program has been operating over the last year. Watch it at www.sedonaaz.gov/councillive.

In this second year, actively renting STR owners are required to renew their permits to continue operating. I have been working with the city's code enforcement staff to bring properties advertising without permits into compliance. Properties advertising without a permit, or with an expired permit receive a warning they are in violation. Failure to comply earns the non-compliant property a citation. Citations may allow 30 days for the property owner to either obtain a permit or cease all advertising and rental activity. Properties that fail to obtain a permit or cease their rental activity before their 30-day deadline are found guilty and fined by the City's Municipal Court.

To date, 163 properties have received warnings. One-hundred, thirty-nine of those properties came into compliance after their warning, and the remaining 24 received citations. Of the 24 properties receiving citations, 17 came into compliance before their hearings and their citations were dismissed. Seven properties received judgments and fines. Currently, 31 properties are involved in the next round of citations. Three of these properties are receiving their third citation. Continued failure to comply results in substantial fines and losing the right to operate an STR for one year.

The STR Emergency Contact List was launched on the city website in January and is updated every other month with the property address and emergency contact's name, phone number and email address for all permitted STRs. The contact list webpage also has a search function where users can enter a street address to see whether a particular address is a permitted STR.

The city continues to operate the 24/7 issues hotline, where complaints about STRs can be called in or emailed so hotline agents may call the emergency contact to resolve the issue described in the complaint.

The hotline has addressed a variety of complaints at STRs including trash spills, lighting issues, parking, barking dogs or dogs running loose, weeds and noise. Some complaints are code violations leading to investigation by code enforcement or Sedona police staff. Some issues are time sensitive and are less effectively addressed after the incident has passed. Noise, parking, trash spills and a barking dog are best addressed while they are occurring. Noise complaints before 10 p.m. are addressed by the STR's emergency contact via the hotline, while after 10 p.m. require the hotline staff to notify the police for investigation.

Hosting an event is also a time sensitive issue. City code prohibits STRs from hosting special events like weddings, conferences, retreats or workshops, and violation of this code could earn the property owner a citation with fines and a one-year permit revocation after hosting just one wedding.

Learn more about making a complaint to the 24/7 STR hotline here: www.sedonaaz.gov/str.

In addition to enforcement, educating property managers and property owners has been highly successful in encouraging permit compliance. Sedona property managers have worked diligently to maintain permit compliance and be responsive to complaints. The city partnered with the Sedona Chamber to develop the Good Neighbor Brochure to educate STR guests around preventing noise, trash, lighting, parking, people and dog-related issues, encouraging guests to be better neighbors while visiting Sedona. Good Neighbor Brochures are shared with property managers at all meetings for placement in rental units. If you would like a brochure for your STR, please reach out to me at tarthur@sedonaaz.gov.

Communicating with residents has also been a priority. I enjoy answering any questions from residents and assisting with complaint-related issues that arise. I will be working on educational videos for both residents and STR owners over the summer to continue to be proactive in providing information and answering frequently asked questions. In the meantime, reach out to me any time with questions about the program at the email address above or at 928-203-5198.