

Before the Dallas City Staff Blocked Access To Information Regarding STR Complaints, Data From The City's Previously Accessible Interactive Map Confirmed STRs Are Spawning a Plague of Nuisance Problems for Residents and That Urgent Action Is Needed

We are residents of Dallas and members of a state-wide coalition of citizens (called TXNeighborhoodcoalition.com) dedicated to saving residential neighborhoods from the wave of short-term rentals that is threatening to wreck them in our city and across Texas. Our neighborhoods and our sense of safety and security in our own homes are being destroyed by an invasion into our single-family zoned residential neighborhoods by short-terms rentals, that is mini-hotels, that flood us with an endless parade of transients. Simply put, our experience has been horrific as long-term neighbors we knew and trusted are supplanted by a revolving door of total strangers.

One of our Dallas members, who is presently a stay-at-home mom raising small children, has an MBA and has substantial experience in doing data analysis. In February 2021, she set out on the coalition's behalf to analyze the noise and other complaints generated by STRs in Dallas and as well to compare the enforcement costs the city must bear because of these complaints. We also wanted to compare that cost to the hotel tax (HOT) revenue the city collected from STRs. She discovered that in September 2020 the city published on a website the locations of the STRs in Dallas (known by the city staff) with an interactive map offering the ability to determine for each STR the number of 311 and 911 complaints filed by residents for the period March 2020 to August 2020. The data included the exact nature of the complaints, that is noise, parking, and trash violations. However, the data was not produced on that website in a way that enabled a comprehensive analysis of all complaints spawned by STRs in Dallas as a group -- even though the city's data base necessarily must have contained the data needed to conduct such a study since the city had captured that complaint data for each STR on which she clicked.

Accordingly, she filed in February 2021 an open records request with the city attorney's office for this data. To our utter surprise, their appalling reaction was to close their file after providing her the addresses and ownership of only 700 of the 2000 plus STRs known by the city in a file that had stripped out the information the city has about complaints pertaining to these STRs. ¹

Worse yet, when she tried to access the interactive map she had been able to use early in February that did show complaints for each STR, she discovered that the city had blocked access to this previously publicly available website, restricting access to only those with sign-in credentials assigned by the city. The only logical conclusion is that someone in city government is intent on hiding data about citizen complaints filed with the city about STRs -- and for that purpose is concealing that information. As of February 2022, the city has still not provided the data sought by our open records request -- and yet the city has not denied that information exists.

Fortunately, before the city staff locked her out of access to the complaint data, she had the chance to conduct her own review of the STR complaint data the city had collected by focusing on four groups of known STRs that she selected at random on the city's website. Collectively, the four groups accounted for 41 STRs identified by the city. Before access was blocked, anyone could use this website to repeat this type of analysis. Even though public access is now blocked, the URL for the report is:

<https://dallasgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=da1255bf41a8466da539b8bc8875fd16>)

¹ Importantly, independent and authoritative analyses by respected third parties put the actual number of STRs in Dallas at over 5,000 as of February 2021.

The city's data showed that the total complaints filed for just these 41 randomly selected STRs in Dallas amounted to a jaw-dropping 3,529 over only a seven-month period.

STR apologists argue that complaints about nuisances at STRs are really the result of a few irresponsible owners. But even a quick look at a subset of the data the city has collected debunks this myth. The astronomical – and ubiquitous – volume of complaints by residents about the nuisances generated by just these 41 randomly-selected STRs demolishes any argument by STR front groups that citizen complaints about nuisances are attributable to the actions of a few bad STR owners. Quite to the contrary, the complaints are widespread and chronic and demonstrate that injecting a parade of strangers into homes in residential neighbors is just a flawed business model.

The heavy volume of complaints at just these 41 STRs points directly to one other grave problem STRs spawn, over and above the pure misery they inflict on neighbors in residential neighborhoods: the high cost to the city of having to respond to this enormous number of nuisances violations. Using the city's data concerning the average costs of handling a complaint for the Dallas Police or Code Enforcement (that is \$292 for each call to the Dallas Police Department and \$44 for each call to Code Enforcement)², the complaints for these 41 STRs alone imposed over \$541,000 of response costs on the city -- while the hotel taxes collected by the city from all of the roughly 5,000 STRs in Dallas only amounted to about \$1 million for the entire year.

There is no reason to think that at least roughly the same negative financial result is not the case for STRs generally. But, as we noted above, the city's action in concealing the complaint data prevented us from completing the full analysis of the incidence of STR complaints and enforcement costs.

In any event, as demonstrated by our analysis of the city's data before it blocked our access, the costs to the city of having to respond to the nuisance conditions STRs produce in residential neighborhoods completely dwarf any hotel taxes collected.

The city's disturbing empirical data demonstrate both the excessive human and financial toll the citizens of Dallas have suffered because the city has failed to act decisively to stop the invasions of single-family residential neighborhoods by these mini-hotels. It should promptly remedy this intolerable situation. To the end, it must regulate STRs by allowing them to operate in the many areas of the city not zoned as single-family residential while forbidding them in the areas that are so zoned -- to protect the very integrity and sanctity of truly residential neighborhoods.

Further while the city studies how best to adopt a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problems generated by STRs already operating in single-family residential neighborhoods – in violation of the city's zoning ordinances forbidding “lodging uses” in those neighborhoods – it should immediately declare a moratorium on the operation and registration of any new STRs in those residential neighborhoods.

² Costs data reported via email by the city on January 11, 2021 to Council Member Paula Blackmon.