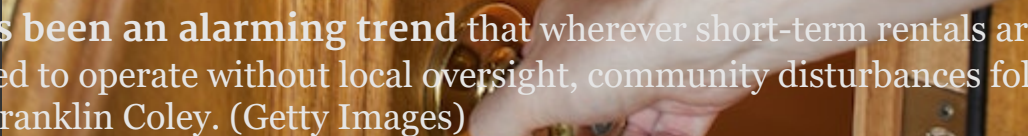


OPINION

Texans worried about short-term rentals

Poll: Most voters concerned about criminal activity, negative effects on neighborhoods





There's been an alarming trend that wherever short-term rentals are permitted to operate without local oversight, community disturbances follow, writes Franklin Coley. (Getty Images)

By FRANKLIN COLEY

Short-term rental companies like Airbnb and VRBO have gained a tremendous amount of popularity in recent years. As these platforms grow, commercial investors are descending upon cities and towns across Texas, buying up large swaths of property and even several blocks of residential neighborhoods at a time to convert into short-term rental units — raising serious safety concerns and depleting housing options for local residents.

The increase in short-term rentals is changing the very fabric of many neighborhoods, and residents deserve to have a voice on this issue. We at the Alliance for Stronger Communities are committed to helping Texans use that voice. ASC is a coalition of neighbors using a collective voice to address issues impacting neighborhoods in Texas and across the country. Our alliance includes child safety advocates, former law enforcement officials, parenting voices and bloggers, civic leaders, housing experts, homeowner association presidents and academics.

Unfortunately, we've seen an alarming trend that wherever short-term rentals like Airbnb are permitted to operate without local oversight, an array of community disturbances follow. Some of these properties are known to attract out-of-control parties, violence and even shootings. Last year, two people were shot at an out-of-control party at an Airbnb in the Manvel area — south of Houston — with another shooting in Houston outside of a party held at an Airbnb. Just this February in Plano, bullets flew from an Airbnb across the street into a home with a 3-year-old.

Potentially exacerbating this issue is the Texas Legislature's consideration of House Bill 2665, a bill that would ban almost all local oversight of short-term rentals and lead to the spread of more unregulated short-term rental units in neighborhoods throughout the state.

Understandably so, a large majority of Texas residents are concerned about the negative impact of short-term rentals in their communities. A new survey conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of ASC reflects this. The online poll was conducted between March 10-17 among a sample of 1,002 registered voters.

A vast majority of Texas voters — 79% — believe it is important for local officials to actively monitor short-term rental properties to deter criminal activity in residential areas. Furthermore, 72% of Texas voters also agree that the presence of commercial short-term rental properties in residential communities raises concerns about neighborhood safety.

A majority of voters (61%) agree that the presence of short-term rental properties in residential communities is harmful to a neighborhood's sense of community. About 66% of voters agree that residential areas should be inhabited by people who intend to live there for more than a few days. Some 61% agree that the presence of short-term rental properties in residential communities can lower the value of surrounding properties, and 58% agree that the presence of short-term rental properties in residential communities would deter them from buying or renting in a certain neighborhood.

The bottom line is that wherever short-term rentals are permitted to operate in the shadows and without the appropriate oversight, they attract neighborhood disturbances that permanent residents should not have to endure. If Texas lawmakers pass HB 2665, it would open the floodgates to this type of activity across the state. It's important that the rights of short-term rental property owners and transient guests do not trump or overshadow the rights of permanent residents who are living next door to these properties. This poll shows the clear concern that Texas residents have about this issue, with most Texas voters (71%) agreeing that lawmakers should prioritize the interests of homeowners and renters in residential areas above those of out-of-state commercial short-term rental investors.

Lone Star State residents deserve better. Texans deserve the ability to implement the commonsense local oversight required to protect their communities from the safety risks short-term rentals pose. That's why it's so imperative lawmakers step up to oppose HB 2665 so that much-needed oversight of problematic short-term rentals can remain in the hands of local leaders.

Franklin Coley is president of the Alliance for Stronger Communities. He wrote this column for The Dallas Morning News.