

# Airbnb: Big Picture — Part 2 (4)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Airbnb, Gadfly's posts, Serious Issues October 6, 2018

*(4th in a series of posts on Airbnb)*

[Airbnb](#)

[Airbnb locations in Bethlehem](#)

## —————How did Williams and Brew respond?

Gadfly is not totally confident of his grasp of the exact steps and chronology in this area. And perhaps others can provide clarification if necessary.

But around June they sued the city:

“Bethlehem’s fledgling home-sharing law, which cracked down on a trio of historic homes listed on the Airbnb website, is being challenged in Northampton County Court. The legal action filed Tuesday alleges the law, which includes a provision that short-term residential rentals be owner-occupied, should have been addressed through a zoning ordinance and that the city didn’t go that route because it would mean those existing rentals in the historic district would have been ‘grandfathered in’.”

At some point — April, I think — the City started citing Williams and Brew for violations of the ordinance. Williams and Brew apparently ignored the citations according to testimony the Gadfly heard yesterday and that lead to yesterday’s hearing in local magistrate court.

## Are Williams and Brew the BadGuys?

Brew was at the hearing yesterday but was not called on to testify. He was certainly the “villain” to the audience members filling the room. In a case before the Court of Common Pleas, Williams and Brew are questioning the validity of the City ordinance itself, and in the magistrate proceeding yesterday they were contesting the validity of citations for violating that ordinance.

But Williams and Brew have a side, a position that goes beyond making money, which one might think of as the main motive. They see themselves protecting the history represented in those houses.

They can be seen talking about their “philosophy” [in the short video here](#): “we’re preserving these homes and also the green space behind these homes and in the front yards. . . . [we are hoping] to bring people in to Bethlehem who will enjoy the historic district as well as support the local businesses. . . . we’re really making an investment in the community. . . . [we aim to] “improve the values in the historic district and also save these large homes from being just turned into apartments.” And here is the Williams and Brew side of the situation as captured in the *Morning Call* story:

“He’s a great neighbor, a reputable businessman who will maintain his properties and be good for the neighborhood,” [a neighbor] said.

That, Brew and Williams say, is their intention.

He is one of the founders of Embassy Bank and she is a retired doctor. They decided about a year ago to buy some historic homes as a way to keep them from becoming run-down and spoiling the neighborhood, where they also live. They started with a home they could see from their backyard, fixing it up and renting it to a professor.

When a neighboring home went on the market, the couple bought that, too, accumulating seven rental homes in the neighborhood, including the Chandler House, which they bought for \$800,000 last summer. The homes less than 3,000 square feet rented immediately, Brew said. But there was no market for homes such as the Chandler House, which exceeds 4,000 square feet.

Recalling that the previous owner had listed one of the three bedrooms on Airbnb, they decided to rent Chandler House rooms from \$150-\$240 a night, or the whole house for about \$720.

Without the income, Brew said he fears he would have to convert the house to two units and, to meet city parking requirements, pave the backyard. He said his solution maintains the historic grandeur of the home while keeping it a place where people live — at least temporarily.

Gadfly is reaching out to Williams and Brew and their attorney for comment.

**What are the stakes in this dispute?**

- the homeowner's right to run a business
- the neighbors' rights to good quality of life
- the city's right to protect residents
- the city's right to collect taxes
- the hotels' rights to be spared unfair competition

What needs to be filled in to Gadfly's BigPicturing here?