

Airbnb: Big Picture – Part 1 (3)

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

(3rd in a series of posts on Airbnb)

[Airbnb](#)

[Airbnb locations in Bethlehem](#)

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So let's look at BigPicture. Gadfly's quoting will be from the newspaper articles.

What is the issue?

Complaints by neighbors about Mary Ellen Williams and Jay Brew using their homes at 258 E. Market, 265 E. Market, and 4 W. Church for short-term rentals through Airbnb.

While Williams and Brew are the foci of the legal proceedings going on that give this situation headlines, others have come to public comment at City Council meetings to complain about similar issues in other parts of the City.

What is Airbnb?

"The Uber of the hospitality market, Airbnb acts as an online broker, connecting people who need a place to stay with hosts who have a spare bedroom, apartment or a full house to rent."

Is Airbnb a BadGuy?

No, not necessarily.

Like every new technology (and I think we can think of this system as a technology), it has a good side and a bad side. And sometimes the bad side is not seen right away. And sometimes there's a time-delay until the bad side is seen. Side-effects come with the territory. Society always has to adjust to a new technology. Society often has to play catch-up.

No doubt many people in Bethlehem have utilized Airbnb. In fact, as of a year ago, 13,000 of us used Airbnb. Two of our City Council members described positively using Airbnb during discussions of this issue. In addition, Williams and Brew are not the only Bethlehem hosts. As of a year ago, 51 of us were hosts.

A Gadfly son and daughter-in-law are hosting us and other family members in South Bend for several days next May around the graduation of our oldest grandchild from Notre Dame (*Go, Irish!*) in a rented house. And it would not surprise me at all if this was an Airbnb transaction. Airbnb does not seem to Gadfly the BadGuy. (Gadfly does not feel the same way about Adams Advertising, but that is another story that apparently will have another chapter.)

What are the complaints?

“Historic residents filtered into City Hall to support restrictions on home-sharing, arguing that short-term visitors are staying in what essentially is a hotel in a residential district and ruining the character of the neighborhood and create parking, noise and safety concerns.” Imagine if a hotel moved in next to you. Frequented sometimes by larger groups of people sometimes intent on partying.

Before we ever heard of Airbnb, one of our new neighbors – a young single woman – was renting a room in her house through Airbnb. We other neighbors were gretzy about parking, suspicious of comings and goings (usually late night), and – ha! – frankly gossipy about what exactly was going on. You can imagine.

We all have neighbors that throw big parties for Fourth of July or Labor Day, etc., and we grant them godspeed and hope for a beer or a hot dog out of them for a bit of inconvenience. But suppose the parties were every weekend?

What did the City do?

After some back-and-forths, City Council adopted this law December 5, 2017.

SHORT-TERM RENTAL LAW

- Hosts must register with city, get homes inspected for \$100 annually and keep a log of visitors and duration of their stays.
- Homeowners can rent as two bedrooms in the house where they live for up to 30 consecutive days, provided they remain in the house while the rooms are rented.

- Hosts who lease whole houses — and do not remain in the house — are barred from doing so for more than 30 consecutive days or 30 days in any calendar year.
- Homeowners are barred from renting out whole houses for less than seven consecutive days.

Chew on this so far.
to be continued