

---

## New high-rise housing structures

---

**From** Chris Coolidge <coolidgefire@gmail.com>

**Date** Sun 1/5/2025 7:14 AM

**To** Fairfax Town Council <fairfaxtowncouncil@townoffairfax.org>

Dear Fairfax Town Council,

Do not build a new high-rise housing structures in the middle of Fairfax. The additional people will clog up Sir Francis Drake, West Marin and the beaches and west marine MORE than they already are.

Fairfax's greed for money \$\$ will affect ALL of west Marin. Think of others before your profits.

There is not one problem that cannot be solved by less human beings on this planet.

Local Resident, Chris Coolidge and family.

---

**Jan 9th Town Council Meeting - Agenda Item 1 - Peri Park Tot Lot**

---

**From** Cindy Swift <c.swift@comcast.net>

**Date** Thu 1/9/2025 11:13 AM

**To** Fairfax Town Council <fairfaxtowncouncil@townoffairfax.org>

Town Council

The staff report does not include a diagram as to where the proposed 'tot lot' is to be placed which would be helpful for community input.

It does not address any specifics as to the infrastructure to be placed in the tot lot, other than the mention of the use of artificial turf. Nor does it address the reasoning for the selection of artificial turf, which will raise environmental concerns.

Regardless of whether this is privately funded or publicly funded, if the Town Council wishes public comment on this item more information should be included in the Staff Report.

Cindy Swift

---

**FW: Cannabis Dispensary Relocation to Fairfax**

---

**From:** Heidi Engelbrechten <hengelbrechten@sbcglobal.net>

**Date:** Tuesday, January 7, 2025 at 3:25 PM

**To:** Lisel Blash <LBlash@townoffairfax.org>, Stephanie Hellman <shellman@townoffairfax.org>, Barbara Coler <bcoler@townoffairfax.org>, Frank Egger <fegger@townoffairfax.org>

**Cc:** bergerjudy@att.net <bergerjudy@att.net>, Fairfax Town Council <fairfaxtowncouncil@townoffairfax.org>

**Subject:** Cannabis Dispensary Relocation to Fairfax

Hello Fairfax Town Council,

The relocation of Marin Alliance for Medical Marijuana, MAMM, (a misnomer, because the group now primarily sells recreational cannabis and wants to expand that element) to 1591-3 Sir Francis Drake should not be permitted.

I live on the San Anselmo side of the town border (near Oak Knolls), and believe the area would be negatively impacted by additional traffic and parking issues. Walking in the neighborhood would be likely become hazardous if a constant stream of cars come circling our area looking for spots 9am-9pm, Mon-Sat, as proposed. MAMM's owner Lynette Shaw told one of a group from Fairfax that they currently average 150 customers per day, and they aim to grow. There is currently no substantial permanent off-street parking available at or near the site. They also currently face a lawsuit and owe massive taxes. Lack of parking, increased traffic, noise, proximity to children waiting for rides to school and the unsteadiness of the business as evidenced by their lawsuit and owing massive taxes should give the Town Council enough reason to decline this relocation.

Thank you for considering declining the relocation.

Best regards,

Heidi von Engelbrechten

San Anselmo

*Heidi*

415-350-4692

---


## Fx CAC Event & Anti-camping ordinance

---

**From** jody timms <jodytimms@comcast.net>

**Date** Thu 1/9/2025 2:13 PM

**To** Fairfax Town Council <fairfaxtowncouncil@townoffairfax.org>

 1 attachment (2 MB)


2.07.25 Fx CAC Event final.pdf;

Hello Mayor and Council members, and staff. I want to be sure you are aware of an event the Climate Action Committee has planned, along with San Anselmo's Climate Action Commission, for Feb 7th-see flyer attached. We hope you can attend and share the info with others. I hope to mention it tonight in open time as well.

I'd also like to be on the record against the anti-camping ordinance--I realize our homeless situation is quite complicated and has been very problematic for many years but I just can't support this initiative as written, especially enacting it at this time of year.

Thanks for your attention and for your efforts on behalf of our Town.

Jody D. Timms, Ph.D., (she/her)

*Climate Action Now! For all of us. For the Earth.* 

*Chair, Fairfax Climate Action Committee*

*Co-founder [350Marin.org](https://350Marin.org)*

*"This, my dear is the greatest challenge to being alive.*

*To witness injustice in the world and not allow it to consume our light."*

*~ Thich Nhat Hanh*

---

## Opposition to Cannabis Dispensary move to 1591-3 Sir Francis Drake

---

From Judy Berger <bergerjudy@att.net>

Date Wed 1/8/2025 2:36 PM

To Lisel Blash <LBlash@townoffairfax.org>; Stephanie Hellman <shellman@townoffairfax.org>; Barbara Coler <bcoler@townoffairfax.org>; Frank Egger <fegger@townoffairfax.org>; Michael Ghiringhelli <mghiringhelli@townoffairfax.org>; Fairfax Town Council <fairfaxtowncouncil@townoffairfax.org>; Linda Neal <lneal@townoffairfax.org>; Heather Abrams <habrams@townoffairfax.org>

Cc Zev Rattet <zev@rattet.com>; Gabe and Maime Robinson <grobinson0@gmail.com>; Joanna & Rob Short <homehaven2@gmail.com>; Marilyn Faulkner <marilynjoanmann@gmail.com>; Jacqueline Stone <jacqstone@comcast.net>; Brian Auger <baugie56@gmail.com>; claire.barnum@comcast.net <claire.barnum@comcast.net>

Dear Fairfax Town Council:

I am writing you on behalf of myself and many neighbors of the borderline streets (including Hill Avenue, Belle Lane and Kent Avenue) of Fairfax to oppose the relocation of the MAMM cannabis dispensary to 1591-3 Sir Francis Drake Blvd. We don't believe this ill-conceived proposal should be referred to the Planning Commission for mitigation. It should be rejected or tabled.

Here are some reasons:

1. Parking, traffic and noise: There is next-to-no permanent, available off-street parking for this location. MAMM owner Lynette Shaw explicitly told one concerned Hill Avenue resident that her current customer volume is about 4,500 per month, or 150 people per day! And Ms. Shaw related at the last Town Council meeting, their hopes and plans are to expand their current customer base, primarily through increased sale of recreational cannabis at the new location. This will likely result in the flooding of adjacent mostly narrow streets (Hill Avenue is a cul-de-sac with no easy turn-around) with customers looking for parking, Mon-Sat, 9am-9pm (proposed dispensary days and hours of operation). A number of our neighborhood residents don't own functional garages or have off-street parking, forcing them to compete daily for available on-street spots. Other nearby businesses will also be affected. More traffic, congestion and noise will decrease our quality of life and family-friendly atmosphere. I already have to back my car into the 5-way intersection of Hill, Kent, and Belle every time I leave. People don't always obey the stop signs and it's dangerous... more so with increased traffic.
2. Exposure to children: There are many children who play in and around our streets and wait at the intersection of Hill and Kent for school pick-ups. The parents in our neighborhood are very concerned about a storefront cannabis location, even if it is not loudly announced with signage.
3. Questionable management: MAMM is facing a bitter lawsuit over ownership and years of unpaid taxes. We don't know who the investors are, where they are from, and what their intentions and expectations are in terms of growing the customer base and modes of product delivery. Are they part of a larger corporate body funding cannabis dispensaries in different communities? Also, the MAMM recreational cannabis business license restricted them to delivery only, but they evaded the intent of this restriction by "delivering" it to customers in a room next door, a violation of their CUP. Are these folks people we can trust to be thoughtful, dependable, honest and cooperative neighbors?
4. Lack of compelling need for cannabis storefront: As you know, cannabis is readily and legally available by phone or internet with free home delivery, from as close as San Rafael. We are not seeking to ban its purchase or sale in Fairfax; rather, to put some sensible boundaries around where and how it is sold, so that it doesn't negatively impact our neighborhood. A storefront model is problematic, especially in a neighborhood like ours.

This request has been rushed before the Town Council by the applicant before seriously considering the drawbacks to our neighborhood. Once the TC refers it to the appointed Planning Commission, it will require a fight to get it appealed. We don't want to have to mount a vocal opposition before the Planning Commission and go that route, but we will if needed. This should not be pushed through without careful consideration of our concerns. A thorough traffic study is absolutely required, and we would be happy to give a tour of our neighborhood to any TC or PC members.

Please listen to your constituents arguing for the retention of our friendly, folksy quality of life in our little corner of town.

Many thanks,

Judy Berger  
1 Hill Avenue, Fairfax  
bergerjudy@att.net

---

**Opposition to Allowing the Marin Alliance for Medical Marijuana (MAMM) to Relocate to 1591-1593 Sir Frances Drake Blvd**

---

**From** Charles Casalnuovo <sfdc2@aol.com>

**Date** Thu 1/9/2025 2:21 PM

**To** Fairfax Town Council <fairfaxtowncouncil@townoffairfax.org>

Town Council,

Concerning Consent Calendar Item i on the council agenda for 01/09/2025, I wish to voice my opposition to Allowing the Marin Alliance for Medical Marijuana (MAMM) to Relocate to 1591-1593 Sir Frances Drake Blvd for the following reasons:

- 1) Expediting the moving of this business to a property with limited available parking will negatively affect residents living in the surrounding neighborhood, such as myself. Parking on Belle, Hill, Belmont and Coolidge is mostly restricted to one side only and two of these street do not provide for through traffic, this will cause a hardship and increased traffic congestion for residents living there.
- 2) The proximity of the proposed address to a tutoring center and preschool should not be disregarded. Those restrictions in the original ordinance were there for a reason. If the CUP for the current location requires closure of the business while the baseball field is in use for organized sports as a legitimate restriction, so then should the proximity to the tutoring center and preschool be a cause for concern.
- 3) While the eviction of the business from its current location is of no fault of the owner, the business should not be rewarded with a loosening or removal of the current ordinance addressing marijuana businesses considering the documented violations of its CUP (as noted in the Staff Report) and the multiple reports of delivery violations and circumventions.

At the very least, this item should be tabled for further research and community input.

Sincerely,  
Lori Casalnuovo  
25 Hill Ave  
Fairfax

---

**Fairfax STR ordinance**

---

**From** MISTY BATCH <mlbatch@aol.com>

**Date** Thu 1/9/2025 2:32 PM

**To** Fairfax Town Council <fairfaxtowncouncil@townoffairfax.org>

Good afternoon, I truly apologize for this email coming in late. However, I have been navigating this situation and I'm just understanding that there is a vote occurring tonight. Perhaps the timing is right on time. Here is our situation, we have a home in Fairfax that we have had as a short term rental, which got terminated due to us being denied back in July as we cannot list this home as a primary residence. This is our second home, we spend a lot of time at this house, however to subsidize our mortgage, we were using it as a short term rental, as well. We never had an issue with any of our renters, in fact, many of our renters were parents of families in Fairfax coming to visit for special occasions, graduations, new babies being born, and holidays. We did a solid check, on all potential guest, as well as had a strict contract. In fact, our neighbors prefer our home to be a short term rental over a long-term rental. Due to our circumstance, as using this house as our own second home, I believe Fairfax is missing out on two key factors. Fairfax is not having our home listed as a long-term rental since we continue to use it as a family with all of siblings, as well as Fairfax is not able to generate a transient occupancy tax from us as we still use the home and are now paying the mortgage without subsidy (since we terminated our STR due to the ordinance). This is causing a strain. I'd like to invite a proposal that homes with strict rental policies and are not Primary Residence's, be allowed to participate in the STR program. We have proven that we are excellent in the STR category and maintained a 4.9 rating on Airbnb/VRBO.

Please consider allowing our home to be considered as an STR. We are more than happy to participate in generating revenue for the Town of Fairfax via TOT and following all ordinances. The only thing we did not qualify for was "primary residence."

If anyone has any questions or would like to see our contract or the limits and liabilities, we had put in place, I am happy to share. Using our home as an STR made it affordable to keep this as our second home as we have enjoyed Fairfax for the last 50 years.

I appreciate your time and consideration of this matter. I will be in attendance at this evening's meeting, should anybody like to engage in dialogue.

All the best and thank you for all you do to keep Fairfax the special town that it is.

*Misty Batch, LMFT*

Mistybatchlmft.com

Telehealth available, servicing all of California!



CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This email and attachments are for the sole use of the intended recipient and may contain confidential and privileged information. Any unauthorized review or use, including disclosure or distribution, is prohibited. If you are not the intended recipient, please contact the sender and destroy all copies of this email.

---

**Public Comment for Fairfax Town Council Meeting: January 9, 2025**

---

**From** PJ Feffer <pjfeffer@gmail.com>

**Date** Thu 1/9/2025 2:44 PM

**To** Fairfax Town Council <fairfaxtowncouncil@townoffairfax.org>

**Cc** Heather Abrams <habrams@townoffairfax.org>; Christine Foster <cfoster@townoffairfax.org>

Hello Fairfax Town Council,

I'm writing to request that items "g." and "j." be removed from the Consent Calendar. I know some of you have made blanket statements that requests to removed items from the Consent Calendar should be granted, so hopefully there will be a consensus to do so.

Both have moved through the process extraordinarily quickly with no serious presentation of discussion of the significant and serious effects on the Town's finances and the Town's budget.

I will follow up shortly with some abbreviated written comments specific to each.

Thank you,  
PJ

---

**Public Comment for Fairfax Town Council Meeting: January 9, 2025 - Consent Calendar Item g.**

---

**From** PJ Feffer <pjfeffer@gmail.com>

**Date** Thu 1/9/2025 3:02 PM

**To** Fairfax Town Council <fairfaxtowncouncil@townoffairfax.org>

**Cc** Heather Abrams <habrams@townoffairfax.org>; Christine Foster <cfoster@townoffairfax.org>

 2 attachments (3 MB)

Are Short-term Vacation Rentals Contributing to the Housing Crisis\_.pdf; How Short-Term Rentals Affect Communities with Loose Restrictions.pdf;

Hello Fairfax Town Council,

It would be a sad irony to approve item "g." in the same meeting that this council approves item "i." for MAMM. Such an extreme expansion of short-term rentals as a permitted use, will obviously lead to more displacement of the kind lamented at School Street Plaza. Will this Council roll over and capitulate forever on every issue?

I've attached an essay about the particular economic and financial harms you would be ushering in, and chosen specifically what is frankly a very moderate business-friendly source in the hopes that you lend it more credence in light of this council's tendency to privilege local business owners over the Town's residents. I've included an excerpt here in quotes: "Given that the short-term rental industry has grown by 800% since 2011, it is therefore not hard to see why many people are concerned about this industry's impact on the affordability and availability of long-term rental housing. Just think about, if a 10% increase in the number of short-term rental listings was found to lead to a 0.42% increase in rents, the actual 800% increase in short-term rental listing since 2011, would be responsible for a 33.6%rent increase over that same time period! For comparison the median household income in the U.S. grew only 18.0% between 2011 and 2016."

I suggest you first read the book **Homesick**, by Brendan O'Brien. I've also attached an interview with him about it from a little less than a year ago. I've copied an excerpt below specifically about "Zombie Towns" which I believe is a phenomenon that Fairfax is vulnerable to and this extreme expansion on short-term rentals as a permitted use would drastically increase that risk.

\* \* \* \* \*

***In the book, you use the phrase "Zombie Towns" to describe places that have been hollowed out by short-term rentals. Can you describe that?***

People are pretty aware of a ghost town, where there was one industry that the town was dependent on that seemed to be profitable. And people moved away, and then the town dried up entirely.

The idea of a Zombie Town . . . it's this idea that the town is still operating, and anybody who goes there can go to shops, and they can buy things. They can go out to eat, they can have someone serving them, they can stay in a house or a hotel. The town seems to be thriving. But it's just been hollowed out, where increasingly the people who work the jobs there don't live there. They have to

drive 30 minutes, 40 minutes, an hour away. And the town itself has become just a shell. It's like a movie set, where people can go and experience it, and experience these beautiful parks, but there's no sign of the people who maintain them. They can go and admire the art in town. But the artists increasingly don't live in the buildings. The people who do everything that makes the place a community have ceased to exist in the space.

I would argue that that's part of the allure for people coming in. People are coming into a place that seems like it's for them. And the thing is that, for all intents and purposes, it has been made into that. The homes are now for tourists; the shops are now for tourists.

That can sound pretty dramatic, but that is happening throughout the country, and especially in smaller towns in the U.S.

There are also similar trends, in different parts of New York and L.A. and Chicago and larger cities, where [people] come back home when they've been away for a while, or they have tried to stay in the place. At some point, they look up and realize, I don't recognize people here. The shops that I used to go to, the school that I went to, has moved away. The things that made this place special have been taken away. I think it's a very sad state of affairs that happens in very rural places and very urban places, and it doesn't have to be this way.

Many interviewees who I talked to, government officials and researchers, there was a sense that this is inevitable, that this is just the way that things go. That doesn't have to be the case. There are so many other ways of maintaining community, of keeping places where they can still change, but it's changing because existing residents are allowing them to change. They have new people coming in without that new presence displacing the old.

\* \* \* \* \*

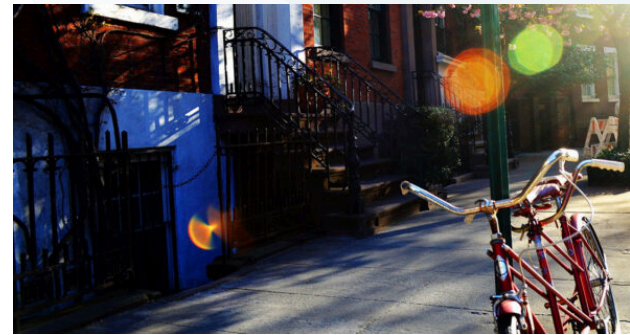
I would be happy to discuss further in as much detail as you would like.

Thank you,  
PJ

[Home](#) / [Learning center](#) / [Are Short-term Vacation Ren...](#)

## BLOGS

# Are Short-term Vacation Rentals Contributing to the Housing Crisis?



The rise and growth of short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb, HomeAway and Flipkey has created plenty of debate amongst local governments, the hotel industry, the real estate

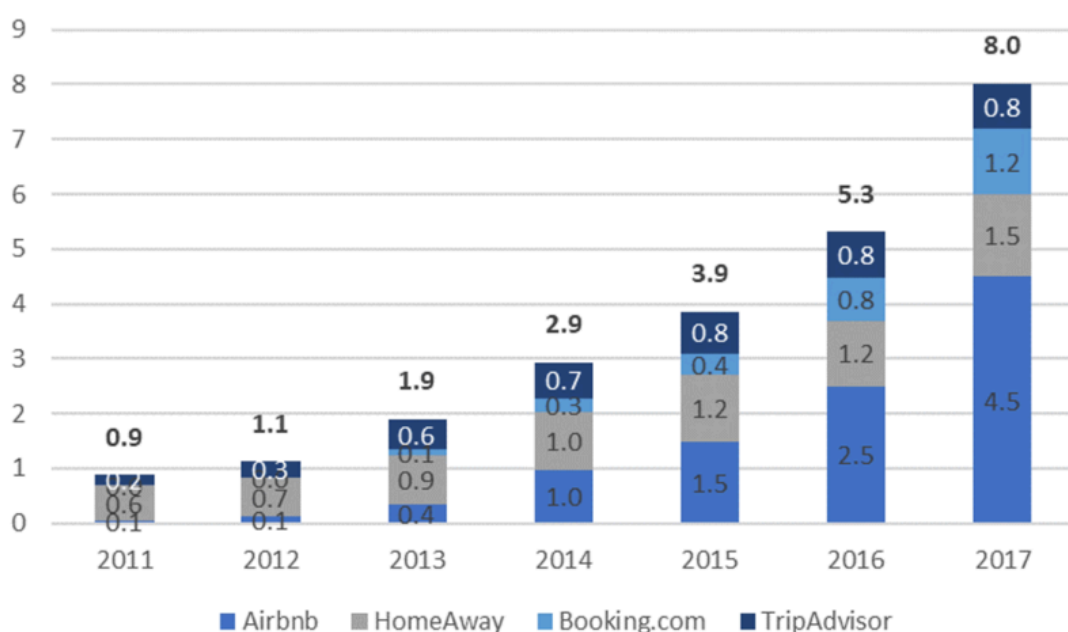
According to a [recent article in the Harvard Law & Policy Review](#) the theory goes as follows: short-term rentals “reduces the affordable housing supply by distorting the housing market in two interconnected mechanisms. The first such mechanism is one of simple conversion: any housing unit that was previously occupied by a city resident, but is now listed on Airbnb year round, is a unit that has been removed from the rental market and has essentially been added to [the community’s] supply of hotel rooms. This leads to a real, but likely mild, increase in rents, an effect that is concentrated in affluent or gentrifying neighborhoods along the [community’s] central core. More disconcertingly, conversion reduces [the community’s] already-limited supply of affordable housing. The second mechanism is “hotelization.” So long as a property owner or leaseholder can rent out a room on Airbnb for cheaper than the price of a hotel room, while earning a substantial premium over the residential market or rent-controlled rent, there is an overpowering incentive to list each unit in a building on Airbnb rather than rent to [local] residents, thereby creating “cottage hotels.” This decreases the supply of housing and spurs displacement, gentrification, and segregation.

While still a theory, more and more evidence is suggesting that these effects are in-fact real. As an example, a [2016 study from the University of Massachusetts](#) concluded that in Boston, MA “home sharing is increasing rents by decreasing the supply of units available to potential residents [and] that a one standard deviation increase in Airbnb listings relative to the total number of housing units in a census tract is associated with an increase in asking rents of 0.4%. For those census tracts in the highest decile of Airbnb listings relative to total housing units, this increase in asking rents ranges from 1.3% to 3.1%, which equates at the citywide mean monthly asking rent to an increase of as much as \$93.”

This conclusion is consistent with other independent academic studies which like this [recent paper published by researchers at the National Bureau of Economic Research, the University of California, Los Angeles \(UCLA\) and the University of Southern California](#) concluded that on a national basis “a 10% increase in Airbnb listings leads to a 0.42% increase in rents and a 0.76% increase in house prices. Moreover, we find that the effect of Airbnb is smaller in

Given that the short-term rental industry has grown by 800% since 2011, it is therefore not hard to see why many people are concerned about this industry's impact on the affordability and availability of long-term rental housing. Just think about, if a 10% increase in the number of short-term rental listings was found to lead to a 0.42% increase in rents, the actual 800% increase in short-term rental listing since 2011, would be responsible for a 33.6% rent increase over that same time period! For comparison **the median household income in the U.S. grew only 18.0% between 2011 and 2016.**

Millions of STR listings



Sources: AirBnB, Expedia, TripAdvisor and Booking.com

It is also important to acknowledge that this is not just a big city problem. The study from the National Bureau of Economic Research, UCLA and the University of Southern California was based on national data and controlled for unobserved zipcode-specific, time-varying factors that could have otherwise skewed their conclusions. Said simply, their conclusion are universally applicable and also apply to in smaller communities like **Madison**, WI and **Long Beach**, CA where the debate about housing affordability and the impact of short-term rentals has taken center-stage in recent years.

To conclude, recent academic research seems to justify that citizens and local politicians have good reasons to be concerned about the impact of short-term rentals on housing



# Granicus Can Help

Host Compliance helps local governments draft, implement, monitor and enforce fair and effective short-term rental regulations. By working with us, our partner municipalities get:

- ✓ **Enforceable regulatory frameworks that simultaneously protects citizens' property rights and the rights of the neighbors**
- ✓ **A dramatic reduction in noise, parking and trash complaints related to short-term renters**
- ✓ **Improved finances resulting from higher Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) / Hotel / Bed Tax collections and permit fees**
- ✓ **Fair, continuous and consistent compliance monitoring and enforcement across 50+ short-term rental platforms (Airbnb, VRBO, HomeAway, FlipKey and dozens of others)**
- ✓ **A dedicated 24/7 hotline for neighbors to report problems**
- ✓ **State-of-the-art reporting and analytics**

To learn more and get a complementary analysis of the short-term rental market in your area, please contact us so we can get you the data you need to take the appropriate actions needed to ensure that the sharing economy works for everyone in your community.



INTERVIEW

HOUSING

## RUNNING RAMPANT: HOW SHORT-TERM RENTALS AFFECT COMMUNITIES WITH LOOSE RESTRICTIONS

Brendan O'Brien, author of "Homesick," talks with us about his new book, and what's he's learned about the effects of short-term rentals in communities like Flagstaff, Arizona; Bozeman, Montana; and St. George, Utah.

---

Proponents of supply-side solutions to housing typically refer to high housing vacancy rates as a good thing. In theory, more vacant apartments mean more options for renters and competition between landlords for renters. But a look at [vacancy rates across the country](#) reveal a [more confusing picture](#): The rate does not track closely with overall affordability.

There are a few reasons for this, but one of the most alarming is the trend of short-term rentals. Since they [emerged in the mid-1990s and were supercharged in the 2010s](#), it's become common for homeowners who have a little bit of extra money to buy a second home as an investment so they can make "passive" income. In some cases, single owners have sprouted mini-empires of entire apartments being rented out on these services. Units being rented out short-term are listed as vacant in census surveys, but they are not available to renters—at least, not for anyone but tourists.

These units pock the landscape of large, coastal cities and persist despite drawing down regulatory hammers. But in some towns, vacation homes and Airbnbs have been given free rein to transform the landscape more fully, crowding working people to the margins.

In his book [Homesick](#), Brendan O'Brien looks at the intersecting issues of second homes, investment properties and short-term rental companies like Airbnb, VRBO and Homeaway. Specifically, he looks at Flagstaff, Arizona; Bozeman, Montana; and St. George, Utah, where these companies have been allowed to run rampant, hollowing out communities and fraying the social fabric. Arizona even [passed a law](#) in 2016 making it illegal to regulate short-term rentals at the local level (the restrictions [were loosened somewhat](#) in 2022). The following interview has been abridged and edited for clarity.

**Roshan Abraham: When did you first notice that short-term rentals were a problem?**

**Brendan O'Brien:** I first noticed that when I stayed in a short-term rental on a trip to New Orleans. I stayed with several friends; we thought we'd save some money and be in more of a home environment, not in a hotel. This was in 2017.



Brendan O'Brien

On that street, there was a sign that said "Neighbors not Airbnbs." It touched off something in my mind where I started thinking about the potential impact, because the house next door was also an Airbnb. We knew because they were pretty loud. It stayed in the back of my mind.

Over the next several years, I was out West and working for public lands. I was trying to bring in more tourism to these places. But I saw these trends of more tourism and more expensive housing. When I started a master's [degree program] in geography in Flagstaff, Arizona, I saw another sign, which said "Homes, not Hotels," and I realized that it's the same issue that I've seen popping up again and again: People who are not from the place but have a space to go that was formerly a home, and instead it's being occupied by tourists and being used for its investment potential.

**You mention in the book that there's a contradiction between city leaders constantly incentivizing more well-to-do people to move there while saying they have to address a supply problem that they are creating. Can you elaborate?**

At first I was studying mountain towns where a big part of their economy is based on tourism. You really see the contradiction there, because tourism jobs typically

don't pay a lot. You have people working in hotels, you have people working in retail, working in restaurants and bars, and those jobs are not going to support an outrageous rise in property values.

You have people buying up properties in these places, with the intent of turning them into second homes, turning them into investments. I saw city officials speaking out of both sides of their mouth when they said, "Yeah, we really have this supply issue," but then they bend over backwards to incentivize more demand.

Housing is typically seen as a local issue. But it's gone global in so many places. You have people buying up properties from other countries and just using that as a place to store their money because that's appreciating faster than the stock market many times.

**There's an argument often made that housing doesn't need to be affordable, that market-rate housing will help poor people in the long run.**



**We can build cities our grandparents only dreamed of.  
We can construct the world our grandchildren truly deserve.  
It just takes *practice*.**

**The People's Practice**  
Powered by ThirdSpace Action Lab

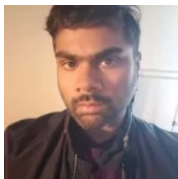
It's always in the long run. There's this message of, well, this is going to help you indirectly. I don't deny that we have a housing shortage overall. But the reason we don't have enough homes is because it's not seen as profitable. And one of the biggest things is that the market is given over to speculation. The price of homes is being driven through the roof in many places, because a segment of homes are second homes or short-term rentals. It raises the price for everything.

When people are buying up land, they're going to price it with the expectation that somebody can make a lot of money by building here, and that just inflates the price of housing. So the housing that is more affordable never gets built.

There needs to be an express focus on building for people who actually live in a place. Once you give the market free rein to build for anyone, then you're just hoping that it trickles down to people. But increasingly, [housing is seen as a commodity](#).

You'll always need more housing built in a place if the housing that is getting built is just being held as an asset with the goal of dragging it up as much as possible. There needs to be a goal of housing starting and staying affordable, [so that] if a teacher moves to a house in 2024, a teacher can afford that house in 2044. If the goal is always to make as much money as fast as possible, it's not going to be affordable.

### **Airbnb says it's just helping people with mortgages earn some extra income. What do you think about that argument?**



**ROSHAN  
ABRAHAM**

---

PUBLISHED: FEBRUARY 22,  
2024

---

SHARE    

---

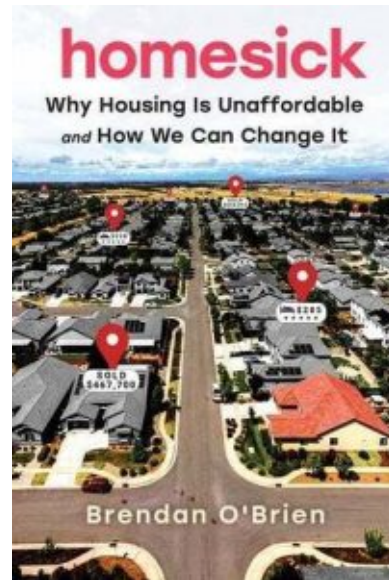
TOPICS **HOUSING,**  
**AFFORDABILITY**

Short-term rentals as they were originally marketed, [the idea] was, you have a spare bedroom, you can rent that out to people and make some extra money. It's a better use of space when otherwise that room would just go empty. Someone coming into the community as a traveler can get a sense of the landscape because they know someone already. They're staying with them.

The person who lives there can benefit more directly from tourism, and I still think that's a great idea. But the way that short-term rentals have transformed over time—using the three [cities] that I studied Flagstaff, Arizona; St. George, Utah; Bozeman, Montana; as examples—it's upwards of 90 percent of short-term rentals that are the entire home. Most of those are offered up for more than half a year. It's not someone who's just in an economically precarious situation, it's someone

who doesn't live in a place seeing an investment opportunity and buying that up with the express purpose of housing tourists.

I see those very differently. And I think the first one should be protected. I think that's a great source of income potential, and you can monitor over time [if] maybe that gets abused in some places. But I think that's very different when you're renting out a room and you actually actively live in a place versus renting an entire place.



**In the book, you mention a law in Arizona that preempts local governments from regulating short-term rentals. I think it's the only statewide law of its kind in the country. It seems pretty drastic. How did that even happen?**

They've loosened it a little bit, but that's still broadly the way the law is written, that cities have very limited regulatory power over short-term rentals.

There's a group called the State Policy Network, and they have different think tanks across the country. There's generally one in every state. In Arizona, it's the Goldwater Institute. They were really instrumental in advocating for that law. And then the short-term rental industry, Airbnb, VRBO, FlipKey, all of those, they lobbied hard for it. And the governor at the time, he made major overtures [to] the two so-called sharing economy companies, and his goal was to make the sharing economy as vibrant in Arizona as Silicon Valley was for the tech industry.

He cited the economic impact, specifically of how much money would be brought in. There was a lot of support for it. And it was a bipartisan bill.

There is more opposition to it [now], but it hasn't been taken down.

There are similar laws [that have been brought up in other places](#), and advocacy for similar laws in other states. And it's tied back to this network, and the laws that they're advocating for are almost precisely the same. Government officials just become rubber stamps for these think tanks and these agencies. It's mind-boggling the amount of power that these groups of people—who aren't elected, who aren't representative of the state—hold over elected officials across the country.

### **Have vacation rentals, not just short-term rentals, been growing in popularity as well?**

There have been studies done that show people are specifically buying a second home or a third home, and they may go there seasonally or they may go for a few days every couple of months. But their primary purpose with it is to rent it out as a short-term rental. Maybe they'll plan to move there years from now, but it's primarily an investment property. They're specifically looking for where the market will go up in value, and at the same time, driving up the market.

When I was studying this, I started thinking about the impact of short-term rentals, and then I started thinking about why there were so many empty entire homes in the first place. And that's where you get into second homes, and homes being used as investment properties, and speculation that's driving up the cost of land.

I really started seeing this trend throughout U.S. history. The second part of the book is a deep dive into the history of things that on the surface don't seem related. I go back through colonization, the movement west across the United States, talking about the Homestead Act, about the military entering into places and clearing it. I talk about suburbanization of the country, of gentrification. What ties all these things together is that communities are being cleared of existing

residents—of the people who make it up and make the place—for outsiders who are perceived to have more money. Throughout history, communities are being sacrificed for profit.

**In the book, you use the phrase “Zombie Towns” to describe places that have been hollowed out by short-term rentals. Can you describe that?**

People are pretty aware of a ghost town, where there was one industry that the town was dependent on that seemed to be profitable. And people moved away, and then the town dried up entirely.

The idea of a Zombie Town . . . it’s this idea that the town is still operating, and anybody who goes there can go to shops, and they can buy things. They can go out to eat, they can have someone serving them, they can stay in a house or a hotel. The town seems to be thriving. But it’s just been hollowed out, where increasingly the people who work the jobs there don’t live there. They have to drive 30 minutes, 40 minutes, an hour away. And the town itself has become just a shell. It’s like a movie set, where people can go and experience it, and experience these beautiful parks, but there’s no sign of the people who maintain them. They can go and admire the art in town. But the artists increasingly don’t live in the buildings. The people who do everything that makes the place a community have ceased to exist in the space.

I would argue that that’s part of the allure for people coming in. People are coming into a place that seems like it’s for them. And the thing is that, for all intents and purposes, it has been made into that. The homes are now for tourists; the shops are now for tourists.

That can sound pretty dramatic, but that is happening throughout the country, and especially in smaller towns in the U.S.



There are also similar trends, in different parts of New York and L.A. and Chicago and larger cities, where [people] come back home when they've been away for a while, or they have tried to stay in the place. At some point, they look up and realize, I don't recognize people here. The shops that I used to go to, the school that I went to, has moved away. The things that made this place special have been taken away. I think it's a very sad state of affairs that happens in very rural places and very urban places, and it doesn't have to be this way.

Many interviewees who I talked to, government officials and researchers, there was a sense that this is inevitable, that this is just the way that things go. That doesn't have to be the case. There are so many other ways of maintaining community, of keeping places where they can still change, but it's changing because existing residents are allowing them to change. They have new people coming in without that new presence displacing the old.

**It seems like there have been renewed attempts to regulate short-term rentals, if not vacation homes, across the country, including in New York City. What impact has that had?**

Bozeman, Montana, just severely restricted new short-term rentals. There are various smaller towns in Colorado that are doing so. A lot of places are realizing that they've been late to regulate them and now they're confronting it. Because they realized: OK, maybe we do have a housing shortage.

But it's low-hanging fruit to start taxing people who don't live in a place, start taxing investment properties, and using that to build more affordable housing. There are a lot of examples throughout the country where they're addressing things on a small scale. I think there's a movement brewing, from organizations on the ground working throughout the country, to not just tax short-term rentals but change our entire understanding of housing. They want to recognize housing as a human right, and it's connected to all these other issues.

When housing is seen as a commodity, you have an influx of people who are unhoused on the street. You have instances where people are paying more and more of their wages to the point where they're forced further out of town.

Suddenly, to pay workers enough to live there, the price of a pizza goes up to 25 bucks. Going out to eat becomes too expensive for most people. Suddenly the things that make it a vibrant community are no longer accessible. So there is a lot of movement brewing to build more housing specifically for residents in a place, specifically for people who are working the jobs that maintain a place.

**At one point you cite a study from the 1970s predicting that vacation rentals would become a huge problem for the housing industry. How long have we known this was a problem?**

They were ahead of their time in seeing that trend, and they probably would have been very surprised at just how little oversight government would have given as this process has taken hold.

Government in many cases is actively supporting the commodification of housing. Leilani Farha, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on adequate housing [from 2014-2020], noted that the Department of Housing and Urban Development sold off a lot of foreclosed homes, hundreds of thousands of foreclosed homes [during the 2008 mortgage crisis]. They didn't sell them back to people who are struggling to afford housing, they sold them to Blackstone and large private equity firms. They sold them for pennies on the dollar. Those private equity firms turned around and made them into huge sources of profit, renting them out for above-market rates.

There's a larger conversation we need to have as a country. There's a denial where a lot of people who have multiple properties that they rent out for market rates, they increasingly say, oh, well, we're low income or we're middle income. But they have multiple properties that are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. They're

renting them out for market rate or above market rate, or they're renting them out as short-term rentals, or they're just holding on to them expecting that the housing prices will appreciate in value.

That's actively stoking the flames of the inequality that we have in the country. There needs to be more reflection about everyday decisions—where are your investments, where is your income going? As a society, what do we want to reward? What do we want to incentivize? Because we're incentivizing people to buy properties and just hold on to them or buy properties and rent them out for higher rates. The problems that exist today are not going to get better. I think they can get better; we just need to really focus our attention on what's happening on a larger scale.

### **Is there anything else you would like to add?**

One thing is all this happens along the existing lines of inequality. The racial inequality that we see throughout our country is the result of the housing system and it's continued to worsen because of the housing system. When we focus on growth at all costs, when we see housing as a commodity, that further entrenches racial inequality.

The second thing is that the environmental impact of all this is huge. And when I tell people that I was studying geography and I was studying housing, they oftentimes are confused. But the way that we use land, the way that we decide who gets to live in a place, has a huge environmental impact.

When we have housing strictly tied to turning a profit, where it's just a commodity, suddenly you have houses sitting empty. You have incentives to not build more housing and not build denser housing, you have incentives to keep people dependent on cars, so they have to drive further and housing gets built further out. In addition to the emissions from that, it also builds this elaborate system of

---

## Concern about MAMM new location

---

**From** Sarah Penndorf <sbpenndorf@gmail.com>

**Date** Tue 1/7/2025 4:14 PM

**To** Fairfax Town Council <fairfaxtowncouncil@townoffairfax.org>

Hello Fairfax Town Council,

My family and I live between Sir Fancis Drake Blvd and Center Blvd, and I'm writing to express concern about MAMM's new relocation, which I understand is expected to be 591-3 Sir Fancis Drake.

We moved to this neighborhood (from the East Bay) for many reasons, and the San Anselmo / Fairfax neighborhood has been the best fit for our family!! I wanted to share that the safety and slower pace are among the reasons - things such as bike friendly streets, safe sidewalks for young children, ease of parking, letting my young kids experience the independence and freedom of running down the block without me within arm's reach. It has been such an unexpected relief to live somewhere safe.

We also love how family friendly Fairfax is. We enthusiastically participate in almost all the family activities, most recently the winter market, winter festival, Hannukah lighting. I really appreciate how much effort the Town puts into activities for families.

I understand from a neighbor that MAMM is interested in relocating to our neighborhood, with interest and plans to expand its daily customers. I am concerned that this new establishment could jeopardize the reasons we moved here - the safety of our neighborhood *and* the family friendly focus. A few specific thoughts to share:

- I am concerned about increased road and foot traffic, and impact on safety and bike-ability and walk-ability
- I would strongly support an establishment that is open to families (retail, restaurant, etc.)
- I am strongly supportive of occupying vacant units and buildings, but not with a dispensary available only to a small subset of individuals

I hope this unit can welcome a small business, but hope that another business is selected.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sarah Penndorf

Maple Lane

San Anselmo (on the Fairfax border)

---

**Bus stops**

---

**From** Wendy Tucker <wentuck@gmail.com>

**Date** Mon 1/6/2025 12:33 PM

**To** Fairfax Town Council <fairfaxtowncouncil@townoffairfax.org>

Hello,

Hi, my family, and friends, feel that the state of the Fairfax bus stops is really terrible. I know the one that was built in the center of town is gorgeous and extravagant but I want to share a picture of this very sad one near the library. It's no wonder people don't want to take the bus.

Is there some fund that Fairfax has to take care of some of these?

We need people to take more transit, this isn't helping... people are visual creatures. Just my two cents!

Thank you so much,

Wendy Tucker

