

Dear Mr. Bonin,

I am writing to you in the hope that my voice will be heard in the increasingly contentious issue of short term rentals in Venice. I am referring to Council file #14-1635.

I recently read the LAANE report on Airbnb which, I believe, is being used by the Venice Neighborhood Council to lobby the city to crack down on short term rentals. Firstly I am a little puzzled why this is solely targeting Airbnb as they are not the only players in this field (though perhaps the most successful). Home sharing has been going on in Venice for as long as I can remember with sites like Craigslist, VRBO, Homeaway etc. Secondly, a lot of the conclusions in this report are totally unsubstantiated, and I take offense to their implication that anyone associated with Airbnb is in "a Cult".

Having said that, the report does bring to light a genuine problem that needs to be addressed, namely apartment owners turning legitimate full time rental units into vacation rentals. This is not in the spirit of "home sharing" and is not good for any neighborhood. This seems to be an unintended consequence of the whole home sharing movement but I believe it can be easily rectified by making short term rentals only permissible in an "owner occupied" situation where owners are onsite to supervise their guest's behavior.

While I believe that was supposed to be the overall conclusion of the LAANE report, it mostly implies that the majority of home share listings in Venice are rental properties that has been taken off the rental market and turned into a full time vacation rentals by greedy landlords. While there are certainly "bad actors" out there they do not represent the majority.

From my personal experience sharing our home has been an enriching experience on many levels. My husband and I are long term residents of Venice. We own our home and have a small guesthouse on our property. We use the guesthouse primarily to accommodate visits from our family and friends as our house is too small.

The "guesthouse" is little more than a spare bedroom with an ensuite. While it is great for a one or two night stopover it is not at all suitable as a standalone rental. For example, it has no cooking facilities. It never was and never will be a "rental property".

Like many of my fellow Airbnb hosts we got into the home sharing community out of necessity. Both our jobs were affected by the recession and we found ourselves needing to augment our wages in order to make ends meet. When my husband first suggested that we rent out our guesthouse when we weren't hosting family and friends I was appalled at the idea. No way did I want strangers in my home!

That was several years ago and I can honestly say it that it has added so much to our lives and lifestyle that I cannot imagine not doing it. The obvious benefit is financial as it has enabled us to continue to pay our bills. It has also helped us do some well needed maintenance to our property, including switching our yard to be drought tolerant, and has afforded us the odd vacation. Unfortunately neither of our jobs have come back up to pre-recession standards so we are still dependent on the extra income.

Aside from the financial aspect and, perhaps more important, are the wonderful people we have met along the way. We have hosted people from all walks of life, all types of professions, all age groups, from all over the world. I was initially surprised at the variety of visitors we got. At first I assumed we would only get a certain "type" of budget traveler. How wrong I was! Many of our visitors are not "budget" travelers but instead are looking for a less homogenized environment than what a hotel offers. They are often great travelers and love meeting other people with similar interests (like us) and getting to know the local hotspots. We promote all the

local restaurants, bars, and shops. Contrary to the conclusions of the LAANE report, we can testify to the fact that our visitors bring lots of commerce to our local community.

We have loved Venice ever since we moved here nearly 30 years ago and we feel like ambassadors when we host guests that have not been here before. I can't tell you what a joy it is to hear a guest gush about how much they have loved their visit to Venice and how much of it they didn't know existed prior to staying with us.

Along the way we have forged strong and lasting friendships with some of our guests. For example, this week we are heading off on vacation with a couple from London that we met through Airbnb several years ago. We befriended another couple from London that sometimes house sit for us when we go away and we have the keys to their home in London which we have stayed at several times. We also befriended a couple from Italy and were invited to their wedding. Then there is the woman from Germany that flew all the way from Hamburg just to surprise me for my 50th birthday! The list goes on and on. Not only have we enjoyed such great experiences as hosts but we have also enjoyed home sharing as guests both domestically and internationally, including meeting up with past guests on a visit to Cape Town. Home sharing has afforded us the opportunity to visit places we would not normally be able to afford. This is a similar situation for our guests. Should visiting places like Venice be the purview of the rich only???

We hope we can continue to welcome people into our home. We are responsible hosts who are on hand to hold our guests responsible too. We have never once received a complaint from our neighbors and, let's face it, who wants to have an unhappy neighbor? That aspect is pretty much "self regulating". Not only that but we have hosted several of our neighbors family members!

Needless to say I feel strongly that there are many positive aspects to home sharing that are not being given equal press, not least of which is the potential revenue stream that the city could collect from occupancy taxes - God knows Venice could do with those tax dollars!!

There is no doubt that you will soon be forced to take a stance on this issue and I hope you will weigh both sides of the argument.

The issue of legitimate rental units being taken off the market and the subsequent issue of neighbors having to deal with "party houses" must definitely be dealt with, however, an outright ban on home sharing would be akin to "throwing the baby out with the bathwater". I believe there is a way to regulate the "bad actors" out of the market while allowing responsible hosts to continue sharing their homes and our lovely community.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. I would like to finish with one last thought:

Owner occupied home sharing is just that – "sharing a home". Banning that type of home sharing will only add full time rental properties to the market where those of us who depend on it to keep our homes will be forced to move out of Venice.

Yours Sincerely,

Madeleine Leighton