



Town of Bristol, Rhode Island

Department of Community Development

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July 29, 2026

TO: Bristol Town Council

FROM: Diane Williamson, Director

RE: **Draft Short Term Rental Ordinance**

Attached, for your review and consideration, is a proposed change to the zoning ordinance regulating Short Term Rentals (STRs). This has been an item we wished to explore for some time but has become a priority because of the public feedback from the Comprehensive Plan Update public engagement. Regulating Short Term Rentals was one of the top issues identified as impacting housing and neighborhoods.

The Planning Board began their review of a proposed ordinance at their May meeting. At the Board's July meeting, they reviewed the attached draft and passed a motion to refer this to the Town Council and recommend adoption of same.

Regulation of STRs is an important tool to help the Town to preserve the availability and stability of long-term housing to rent or own in the Town of Bristol. Presently, the maximum number of short-term rentals in Bristol registered with the State's Department of Business Regulations (DBR) has been 164 rental listings in April 2026. This represents approximately 1.76% of all housing units, or housing for approximately 360 people (based on 2020 Census data showing average household size). Since April it appears that a number of State registrations have since lapsed, bringing the total number of registrations to around 90 in June 2026.

The Department of Community Development and the Town Solicitor's office reviewed the State Law and similar ordinances that have been adopted in other Rhode Island towns. This draft is largely based on the 2024 Middletown ordinance tailored for Bristol.

Some key points from the proposed draft ordinance are noted below:

- STRs will require a Special Use Permit from the Zoning Board of Review;
- STR's that have an active registration with the DBR at the time the ordinance is adopted will be exempt from the regulations, but any STR that has a lapse in their registration for one year will need to obtain a Special Use Permit;
- The Special Use Permit standards include a requirement for the owner/operator to be physically present on the property during all rental periods, a limit on the number of occupants and bedrooms that can be rented, parking requirements, and an explicit ban on advertising rentals as event spaces or party houses;
- STRs will also be required to post their State registration number and contact information where it can be seen from the public street, during all rental periods;

Once adopted, the Department of Community Development would enforce the provisions of this ordinance, working with RI Department of Business Regulations.

Along with the Planning Board, I also recommend that the Town Council adopt this ordinance.

Thank you.

cc: Steven Contente, Town Administrator

Short-Term Rental Ordinance

Article I. In General.

Sec. 28-1. Definitions

Amend as follows:

* * *

Short Term Rental means a building in which one or more dwelling units or rooms for sleeping are rented for lodging accommodations for periods of 31 consecutive days or less with or without the furnishing of meals and with the owner who is in charge and manages such rentals residing on said property at all times during the period of such rental. No more than six short-term renters, regardless of age, shall be allowed during any rental period irrespective of the number of dwelling units or rooms for sleeping that are contained in the building. Only one building on a lot or parcel of land shall be allowed a short-term rental use. All short-term rentals must be registered in accordance with R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-63.1-14, as amended.

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Article III. Permitted Uses.

Sec. 28-82. Use Regulations

Amend the Permitted Use Table as Follows:

ZONING DISTRICTS	R-80	R-40	R-20	R-15	R-10 R-10SW R-8	R-6	LB	GB	D	W†	M	OS	EI	HPC	MMU	PI
RESIDENTIAL																
<u>Short Term Rental</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>

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Article V. Supplementary Regulations.

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Sec. 28-162. Short-Term Rentals.

- (a) *Applicability.* Short Term Rentals validly registered with the State of Rhode Island at the date of adoption of these standards shall be presumed to be legally non-conforming pre-existing uses and thus exempt from a special use permit and resident-occupancy requirements unless registration is not renewed with the Department of Business Regulation and allowed to lapse for a period greater than 365 consecutive days. After 365

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consecutive days, the use shall be presumed to be abandoned, at which point a special use permit must be obtained restart operation. Abandonment may also be established by any other overt act or failure to act indicating an intent to abandon under applicable law.

(b) Standards.

1. A special use permit shall be required for any property, lot or parcel hosting or advertising short term rentals for more than seven (7) total nights in a calendar year. A special use permit may be granted by the Zoning Board if all standards are met. Special use permits for Short Term Rentals shall be valid for three (3) years and may be renewed. The owner who is responsible for managing a short-term rental must reside on the same property, lot, or parcel during the entire duration of any short-term rental.
2. The following requirements are conditions of any approved Special Use Permit and must be submitted to validate the approval:
 - a. A valid Short Term Rental Registration with the Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation shall be a condition subsequent for a special use permit.
 - b. Valid home or commercial insurance policy covering short term rentals with coverage no less than \$1 Million shall be a condition subsequent to a special use permit.
3. No more than 5 Bedrooms shall be rented in total for short term rentals per property, lot, or parcel.
4. One off street parking spot per bedroom shall be required in addition to the minimum parking spaces already required for the building.
5. Any unit that is not a legal residential unit shall not be eligible for short-term rental.
6. The DBR registration number of the rental, property address and contact information for owner or resident manager must be posted conspicuously where it can be seen from a public street during rental periods in a manner prescribed by the Zoning Officer.

Properties, lots, or parcels hosting Short Term Rentals shall not be used or advertised in whole or in part as venues for events, parties, or functions. Short Term Rentals shall be used only for transient lodging accommodations as defined in these standards.

Secs. 28-1623—28-180. - Reserved.

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