



Town of Bristol, Rhode Island

Department of Community Development

10 Court Street
Bristol, RI 02809
bristolri.gov
401-253-7000

May 6, 2026

TO: Planning Board

FROM: Diane M. Williamson, Director

RE: **Proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment Regulating Short Term Rentals**

The above draft ordinance is before you for review and for providing a recommendation to the Town Council.

My office has been working on this with the Town Solicitor's office and the attached draft includes their input and legal research on the topic. The ordinance regulates only any new Short-Term Rentals as a Special Use Permit with standards in all residential zoning districts and mixed use zones. Anyone who is currently registered with the State isn't regulated, unless they let their registration lapse for one year or more and then they would have to apply to re-open. The standards require owner-occupants (or long term residents that lease) and include standards on number of bedrooms that can be rented, off-street parking requirements, and the posting of relevant information on property signage.

When we had the workshops on the Comprehensive Plan Update, Short Term Rentals was one of issues that had the most concerns relative to affordable housing as the Town continues to lose housing stock to the rentals. While this ordinance won't regulate those existing (unless their registration lapses) it should control the creation of new ones.

We are working with the State DBR on getting a public listing of those that are already active registrations so that we can monitor the existing versus any new rentals.

New Section 26-162

Bristol Zoning Ordinance

Definition

Short Term Rental shall be defined as use of any dwelling unit in whole or in part on a property, lot or parcel for transient lodging accommodations, not to exceed thirty (30) nights at a time and not already covered under definitions for boarding house, hotel, motel, or Bed and Breakfast in this chapter.

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 the previous standard.

Any property, lot, or parcel hosting short term rentals must be occupied by an owner or a domiciled primary resident under a lease of more than 30 days at all times during the duration of any short-term rental.

Short Term Rentals validly registered with the State of Rhode Island at the time 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 consecutive days, the use shall be presumed to be abandoned, at which point a special use permit must be obtained and owner-occupied requirements must be met to restart operation. Abandonment may also be established by any other overt act or failure to act indicating an intent to abandon under applicable law.

Standards

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 Bristol Zoning Board of Review if all standards are met. Special Use Permits for Short Term Rentals shall be valid for three (3) years.

1. 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
- 2. No more than one whole housing unit per lot or parcel may be rented as a short-term rental.
- 3. No more than 5 Bedrooms shall be rented in total for short term rentals per property, lot, or parcel.
- 4. The maximum occupancy for a bedroom shall be no more than two (2) persons per bedroom. Children under three (3) years old are exempt from this limitation.
- 5. One off street parking spot per bedroom shall be required in addition to the minimum parking spaces already required for the building.
- 6. Any units that are not legal residential unit shall not be eligible for a short-term rental.
- 7. 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.

Proposed Allowable Zones

	R-80	R-40	R-20	R-15	R-10	R-6	LB	GB	D	W†	M	OS	EI	HPC	MMU	PI
					R-10SW											
					R-8											
Short Term Rentals	S*	S*	S*	S*	S*	S*	S*	N	S*	S*	N	N	N	N	S*	N

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