



Subject: Community Engagement on Proposed Short-Term Rental Accommodations Licensing By-law

To: Council

From: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

Report Number: 2025-112

Meeting Date: May 13, 2025

Recommendation:

That Chief Administrative Officer Report 2025-112 be received; and

That Council direct staff to implement the proposed comprehensive public engagement plan related to short-term rental accommodations in Port Colborne, as outlined in this report.

Purpose:

On April 9, 2024, Council received report 2024-25 from the Planning Division that outlined three options regarding a potential regulatory framework for short-term rental accommodations in Port Colborne. At that meeting, Council approved option 3, which included a combined approach involving amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-law, along with the implementation of a comprehensive Licensing By-law for short-term rental accommodations in Port Colborne.

On October 8, 2024, Council approved report 2024-176, which included an initial round of amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-laws that would enable the future licensing by-law for short-term rental accommodations in Port Colborne.

Since then, staff have drafted the proposed By-law to License, Regulate and Govern Short-Term Rental Accommodations in Port Colborne (Appendix A), and are now recommending that it be shared with the public, in draft form, and that a comprehensive engagement plan be conducted to gather feedback on its contents.

Background:

Short-term rental accommodations have existed in most municipalities for a long time, particularly among cottage owners who rent or lend their seasonal homes to friends, family, or acquaintances for leisure. In recent years, residents have begun using internet-based sharing platforms, such as Airbnb and VRBO, to rent out entire homes or dwelling units to the public. This increased accessibility has driven higher demand for short-term rental accommodations and has led to a rise in complaints from nearby residents, regarding issues related to safety, noise, parking, zoning compliance, litter, property standards, and fire safety violations.

To support community demand for some type of oversight of these short-term rental accommodations, Council approved a combined approach (labelled Option 3 in report 2024-25), which included making amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-law, and developing a new by-law to license short-term rental accommodations in Port Colborne. To supplement the new licensing by-law further, additional amendments to both the Official Plan and Zoning By-law will be required.

At a high level, the proposed By-law to License, Regulate and Govern Short-Term Rental Accommodations in Port Colborne aims to ensure short-term rental accommodations operate safely, comply with municipal standards, and minimize negative impacts on neighbourhoods. By introducing licensing, inspection, and enforcement provisions, it seeks to protect the health, safety, and well-being of residents, promote accountability among property owners, and address community concerns related to the growing use of short-term rentals.

Discussion:

Staff are recommending engaging the community to gather their feedback on the proposed By-law to License, Regulate and Govern Short-Term Rental Accommodations in Port Colborne (Appendix A). Engaging the community on this matter will help to ensure that the perspectives, concerns, and suggestions of residents, property owners, and local businesses are considered before Council reviews the final by-law. Engaging the public promotes transparency, helps identify unintended consequences, and increases public trust in the regulatory process. Through this engagement, staff hope to gain a clearer understanding of how short-term rentals are impacting neighbourhoods, gather feedback on specific by-law provisions (such as licensing, safety requirements, and enforcement), and strike a balance between supporting tourism and protecting the quality of life for residents. The feedback collected would inform potential revisions to the by-law to ensure it is fair, enforceable, and aligned with community values.

Overall, the engagement plan has several high-level objectives, including:

- **Inform the community:** Ensure the community has clear, transparent, and accessible information about the proposed short-term rental accommodations by-law.
- **Gather feedback:** Provide residents with a range of in-person and virtual opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas about the proposed licensing by-law.
- **Identify concerns and opportunities:** Review feedback to highlight areas of alignment and identify potential improvements or alternatives to proposed licensing of short-term rental accommodations.
- **Ensure transparency:** Provide the community with access to the feedback collected to demonstrate how the information collected informs Council's decision-making.

The proposed engagement plan includes a variety of channels and mediums to ensure all key audiences are aware of the opportunity to provide feedback and can do so in a way that works best for them.

If approved, this plan would include:

1. Online survey
2. Paper-based survey
3. In-person drop-in open houses

Each item is discussed further below:

1. **Online survey**

An online survey would launch on May 14, 2025, and would ask multiple-choice and open-ended questions for community members to offer their thoughts on the proposed by-law to licensed short-term rental accommodations within Port Colborne. Multiple-choice questions are an efficient option to collect and analyze feedback, while open-ended questions allow community members to provide qualitative insights in their own words. The survey would close on June 9, 2025.

2. **Paper-based survey**

To accommodate community members without access to the online survey, an identical paper-version would be available at City Hall, the Vale Health & Wellness Centre, and the Port Colborne Public Library). The surveys would be collected for analysis beginning June 9, 2025.

3. In-person drop-in open houses

City staff would host two in-person drop-in style open houses on Wednesday, June 4 from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Thursday, June 5 from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Both sessions would be held in the Golden Puck Room at the Vale Health & Wellness Centre.

Staff will also aim to plan an in-person engagement opportunity at the Sherkston Shores Sun Retreats campground, since so many of the short-term rental accommodations in Port Colborne are located in this area. More details on this opportunity are to follow.

Successfully communicating about the engagement opportunities will be a vital part of gathering enough meaningful feedback to support Council's decision-making process. The Corporate Communications team would launch a comprehensive communications campaign to promote the engagement opportunities, which would include (but not be limited to):

- Sharing information on the City's website
- Posting social media content and events on City channels
- Digital advertising opportunities
- Media outreach/promotion
- Hard-copy posters with QR codes directed to the online survey
- An article in the June edition of City Hall News
- ...and more.

Timeline

The engagement project would begin on Wednesday, May 14 and end on Monday, June 9. Once completed, results would be collected, analyzed, and provided to Council in a comprehensive summary report on July 8, 2025.

Also on July 8, 2025, staff would bring forward any additional required amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-laws.

It is proposed that a finalized version of the By-law to License, Regulate and Govern Short-Term Rental Accommodations in Port Colborne come into effect on November 1, 2025, in advance of the 2026 rental season.

Internal Consultations:

Staff from Planning, Legislative Services, By-Law Services, and Corporate Communications have been working collaboratively to develop the proposed by-law and community engagement plan. Staff from Finance, Tourism, the Fire Department, external legal counsel, and external consultants MHBC have also provided input to the project.

Financial Implications:

This report is focused primarily on the public engagement activities related to the proposed licensing of short-term rental accommodations in Port Colborne. All expenses related to the public engagement activities are captured in the 2025 operating budget.

Additional staff resources will be required to implement the licensing and inspection process, though the fees collected through the program will cover the costs of the additional resources required for enforcement. Licensing fees will be recommended at the July 8, 2025 Council meeting.

Public Engagement:

The public engagement plan outlined above includes an online and paper-based survey and in-person drop-in open houses at the Vale Health & Wellness Centre on June 4 from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. and June 5 from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Results from the public engagement opportunities would be presented to Council later this summer.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillar(s) of the strategic plan:

- Welcoming, Livable, Healthy Community
 - Economic Prosperity
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Conclusion:

The proposed community engagement plan represents an important step in ensuring that the licensing of short-term rental accommodations in Port Colborne reflects the

needs and concerns of residents, property owners, and businesses. By gathering broad and meaningful input, the City can refine the proposed By-law to License, Regulate and Govern Short-Term Rental Accommodations in Port Colborne to balance tourism growth with neighbourhood well-being. Staff are committed to a transparent and inclusive process that builds public trust and informs thoughtful decision-making. Council's support will enable staff to move forward with engagement activities that will ultimately shape a fair, effective, and enforceable licensing framework.

Appendices:

- a. Proposed By-law to License, Regulate and Govern Short-Term Rental Accommodations in Port Colborne

Respectfully submitted,

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Report Approval:

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.