

Question from Councillor Carr (received in writing Oct.26)

Question: "How do we intend to overcome the challenge of identifying individuals who market a STR without a valid business licence, particularly if all STR platforms do not agree to enable or require a host to include their Vancouver business license number, or reveal to the City who the host is if they fail to post their Vancouver business license number?"

Answer:

- Some platforms have indicated that they are willing to provide a field for a business licence number in the listing, but have not committed to *requiring or validating* a business licence from the host. Platforms have also not yet committed to *revealing or removing* non-compliant hosts. The City will pursue Memorandums of Understanding (MoU's) with the major platforms to agree on an approach for this.
- In addition, or without that commitment, staff expect to be able to use "screen-scraped" data to help identify postings without licenses. This is an imperfect approach because "screen-scraped" data is not always 100% accurate, but is helpful to rapidly identify suspected non-licensed listings. This data is currently being used to support enforcement in other municipalities in BC (Nelson, Tofino, Ucluelet) and elsewhere.
- If a STR advertisement is posted without a business licence,
 - Staff will use multiple data sources to attempt to identify the operator, including "screen-scraped" data to identify the location and unit, comments and reviews on the listing, and any 3-1-1 calls or complaints with information related to the unit.
 - When we have enough information to identify the person/address/unit, we will:
 - Send a letter to advise the owner or resident to stop renting the unit in a manner that is not allowed, or face a \$1,000 ticket per violation. The letter will direct the owner or resident to the website to register for a business licence.
 - If the advertisements persist, we would issue an enforcement order to stop operating by a set date, or face a \$1,000 ticket per violation. Staff would also collect evidence to support ticketing and/or prosecution, which could include collecting listing data online, going to a unit to inspect it, or gathering information from complainants about issues and behaviors.

- If the order does not result in action, we will issue tickets and could escalate to the City Prosecutor's office, which could pursue larger fines or an injunction via the Provincial court.

- If the operator or specific unit of the unlicensed listing is unknown:
 - We would try to work with the STR Platform to remove the listing or ask them to contact the host and provide the same information in the initial letter (explained above). *(It should be noted that thus far, no STR Platform has been willing to share private information [such as name or specific address] of individual hosts on the Platform, so the City must rely on the Platforms to communicate with the hosts or take other actions to investigate or remove the host.)*
 - If the STR Platform is not cooperative, it is possible to require them to share data via court order. Depending on the circumstances and nature of the violation, the City could pursue this.
 - Further, and independent of the Platform cooperation, staff could consider making a booking and visiting the unit to collect evidence to support prosecution or injunction efforts.