A REGULATORY MODEL FOR SHORT-TERM RENTALS TO ENHANCE THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF HISTORIC CENTERS

Short-Term Rentals (STR) Regulations - **San Antonio, United States**

1. DESCRIPTION

San Antonio's Short-Term Rentals (STR) Regulations constitute an ongoing municipal program designed to regulate platforms such as Airbnb and VRBO. Initiated in 2018, its main objective is to protect residential areas while allowing STR activity under controlled conditions. Led by the City's Development Services Department (DSD), the regulation establishes a comprehensive framework that differentiates between owner-occupied and non-owner-occupied rentals, limits the density of STRs in residential areas, enforces platform accountability, and ensures fair tax collection.

2. CONTEXT THAT MOTIVATED THE PRACTICE

By 2017, San Antonio experienced a rapid surge in unregulated STRs. This led to reduced housing availability, increased nuisance complaints, and mounting tensions in residential districts, including those with historic designations. At the time, the city had no regulatory tools beyond hotel tax collection. Residents voiced concerns over noise, safety, and neighborhood disruption, while property owners defended their rights. The lack of an appropriate framework compelled the city to create a balanced system reconciling community needs, housing stability, and the economic opportunities associated with STRs.

3. APPROACH / METHOD

- A multi-stakeholder Task Force was installed with equal representation from neighborhood groups and industry stakeholders to ensure legitimacy and compromise.

- The regulatory mechanisms consist in:
    - Two STR categories (Type 1: owner-occupied; Type 2: non-owner-occupied).
    - **A 12.5% density cap per block** face for non-owner-occupied STRs.
    - Mandatory platform responsibilities: display of valid permit numbers, removal of illegal listings, and direct remittance of hotel occupancy taxes.
    - Enforcement tools for nuisance properties, including permit revocation after repeated violations.
    - Quiet-hour rules and compliance with international building code occupancy limits.

4. EXPECTED AND IMMEDIATE EFFECTS

Expected effects

- Preserve housing availability and reduce displacement pressure in residential and historic neighborhoods.
- Ensure fair contribution from STR operators to municipal revenues and heritage preservation.
- Promote a balanced coexistence between tourism and residential life.

Immediate effects

- Significant reduction in nuisance reports and neighborhood complaints.
- Strengthened coordination between municipal departments (Development Services, Code Enforcement, Police).
- Increased public confidence due to annual reporting and transparent data.
- More stable residential environments in areas previously dominated by unregulated STR activity.

Measurable results

- Hotel occupancy tax revenue surged from USD 100,000/month to USD 1,000,000/month (+900%).
- Permit processing efficiency improved through the creation of a dedicated STR enforcement team.

5. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The control of STR density strengthens the protection of the residential function of historic centers experiencing housing pressure and unregulated STR proliferation.
- Habitability is improved by reducing nuisances and ensuring fair, transparent STR operations.
- The enhancement of municipal governance capacity is necessary to guarantee platform accountability and data-driven rules in historic centers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

https://www.sa.gov/Directory/Departments/DSD/STR