



# Short-Term Rental Guide

City of Cambridge  
Inspectional Services  
Department  
831 Massachusetts Ave.  
617-349-6100

## 1 Understanding the Basics

### Overview

Short-term rental (STR) refers to the rental of any dwelling unit or bedroom as residential accommodation for a duration of less than 30 consecutive days. Short-term rentals are allowed within certain parameters, and there are rules and regulations you must follow to legally rent out your residence on a short-term basis. See Section 4.60 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance. First you must determine if you meet the eligibility requirements.

### Are you eligible?

The **operator** of a short-term rental must meet ALL of the following criteria in order to be eligible:

- The operator must be an **owner** of the dwelling unit, or a **tenant** of the dwelling unit (with permission of the owner) to offer a unit or room for short-term rental.
- The operator must live in the STR unit as a **primary residence** and may rent out up to a maximum of three legal bedrooms, called **operator-occupied** short-term rental; AND/OR, the operator must live in a unit adjacent to the STR unit as a **primary residence** and own all the other units in a building which can only contain a maximum of **four (4) residential dwelling units or less**. An **owner-adjacent** short-term rental may only be rented as a whole unit, not as individual bedrooms.

## 2 Understanding the Terms \*

A residential dwelling unit is a house or an apartment in which a single household resides. If you live in a multi-room house, that is one unit. If you live in an apartment, that is one unit.

The short-term rental operator is the person(s) offering a dwelling unit or bedroom for STR.

Only operator-occupied and owner-adjacent STR's are allowed.

Each STR operator may only register one (1) operator-occupied, AND/OR one(1) owner-adjacent short-term rental unit.

If you have an operator-occupied short term rental, you can rent out no more than three (3) individual bedrooms in your unit. The unit can be in any size multi-family building. The bedrooms can be rented to different parties if the operator is not absent for more than seven (7) consecutive days.

If you have an owner-adjacent short term rental, you must rent out the whole dwelling unit to one party. You cannot rent out individual rooms to different people.

To qualify a unit as a primary residence, you must reside in the unit for the minimum time period established by the Commissioner of Inspectional Services.

You are NOT eligible to register a short-term rental if the unit is subject to the Inclusionary Housing Program, designated as below market rate, or subject to income restrictions under any City, State, or Federal law.

The residential short term rental unit must be registered with the City's Inspectional Services Department. Registration is contingent upon successful inspection of the STR unit.

The dwelling unit or bedroom offered for STR must comply with State Building and Sanitary code requirements for occupancy. This includes ceiling height, adequate ventilation, room size and light requirements, life safety devices and egress from the dwelling unit and building, and other applicable codes.

For Tenants: The Short-Term Rental Ordinance does not override any lease or rental agreements, condominium bylaws, or any other regulations to which you may be subject as a tenant. Please read your lease carefully before submitting an application. The City of Cambridge does not enforce lease or other private agreements.

You must obtain written permission from the property owner and, if applicable, the condominium association. You will need to provide a copy of your lease or rental agreement. Note that City staff may contact the owner(s) of the STR unit for verification.

\* A short-term rental must comply with all the applicable provisions of the City of Cambridge Zoning ordinance, including but not limited to all conditions set forth in Zoning Ordinance Section 4.60 – Short-Term Rentals.



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## 3 Getting Started

### Application

Submit a Short-Term Rental Registration Application online through the ISD website, along with the requisite supporting documents.

### Supporting Documents

- Proof of liability insurance in an amount approved by the Commissioner of Inspectional Services or provide proof that liability coverage in an equal or higher amount is being provided by any and all hosting platforms you use.
- Written approval from condominium association and/or building owner.
- Floor plan of the dwelling unit indicating bedrooms to be offered for short-term rental. The plan may be sketched by hand but should be labelled, neat and legible.
- Proof of the operator's primary residence with either:
  - 1) Documented enrollment in Cambridge residential tax exemption program, or
  - 2) Signed affidavit along with photo ID and current government or utility correspondence with the operator's name and address issued.
- Other documents listed in the application.

### Application Fee

The fee to obtain a certificate of registration is \$500. You may pay the \$500 fee at the time the application is filed with ISD, or you may agree to a payment plan that allows you to pay \$100 towards the fee on an annual basis over five years. If you select the payment plan option, the initial payment of \$100 is due at the time the application is filed with ISD, and the certificate of registration will be issued subject to the annual payment. Failure to pay will result in the immediate revocation of the certificate of registration.

## 4 Inspections

### Scheduling an Inspection

Once your application has been approved, you will receive email notification and instructions for scheduling an inspection with a housing inspector. A sample Inspection Checklist is available on ISD's website.

The following information must be posted in owner-adjacent short-term rental units, and this information must be provided to all short-term renters:

- Instructions for disposal of waste per Cambridge recycling & composting programs;
- Emergency exit diagram must be posted in each bedroom used as short-term rental and on all egresses from the dwelling unit;
- Local contact information in the event of temporary absence of the owner or operator must be made available to renters;
- Certificate of Registration must be posted in the STR unit.

### Certificate of Registration

Upon satisfactory inspection of the short-term rental, you will receive a Certificate of Registration. You may now advertise and offer the unit for short-term rental.

## 5 Ongoing

The Certificate of Registration is valid for five (5) years, and will terminate upon change of unit ownership or change of operator. Inspections will also be conducted every five years, or upon change of ownership.

An owner-adjacent short-term rental operator must keep accurate books and records of their business, and make them available to the Inspectional Services Department upon request.

All short-term renters are subject to the City of Cambridge parking regulations. It is the responsibility of the STR operator to inform their guests of the parking regulations.

Code violations or any violations of the Short-Term Rental Ordinance will be subject to fines of up to \$300/day.

Complaints about occupancy conditions or other violations regarding the short-term rental ordinance will be investigated by the Inspectional Services Department.