

September 12, 2023

To: Elana Arthurs, Chief Administration Officer, Douro-Dummer Township  
Cc. Martina Chait-Hartwig, Clerk

**Re: Short-Term Rentals agenda item for October 3, 2023 Council meeting**

Dear Ms. Arthurs:

Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns about the serious and growing issue of commercial Short-Term Rentals run by owners in Douro-Dummer. Please include this letter and accompanying petition in the meeting package for all members of Council.

As residents of Upper Stoney Lake in Douro-Dummer Township we have a number of serious concerns about the frequent disturbances caused by Commercial Short-Term Rentals in our area. These rentals are run almost entirely as businesses, with absentee owners taking little to no responsibility for the actions of their renters. These commercial STRs on Stoney rent to multiple large groups, a dozen or more people at a time, every weekend and most weeks in the summer.

We and our neighbours are kept awake repeatedly by overnight parties with loud music played well past midnight, where fires sometimes are left to burn unattended. Then after departure, garbage is often left behind or dumped, and is spread by animals, leaving a mess for neighbours to clean up. Efforts to discuss this with owners are usually ignored and neighbours are simply told to "Call the Police".

Police have more important issues to attend to, and the very neighbours who are suffering significant loss of enjoyment of their own properties should not have to be constantly vigilant about the threat of fire, or be responsible for "policing" these commercial STRS and contacting the authorities.

Shoreline Residential owners pay the majority of Douro-Dummer property taxes, while STRs provide little to no economic benefit to the township. The growing STR trend also puts a strain on our Township infrastructure – public and private roads, healthcare, garbage services and recycling – and has environmental impacts.

Commercial STRs with far too many occupants damage lake water quality by overloading septic systems, causing phosphorus and E. coli to leach into the water. Many ads for STRs say "sleeps 14" or "sleeps 16", while the cottage septic system was likely built to handle three bedrooms on the basis of two people per bedroom.

We appreciate that the Township took a step toward resolving this problem by setting up a committee to study it, with representatives from both sides of the issue. However, we were appalled to see how this process evolved, with a Chair who was clearly biased, and a meeting

taken over by an aggressive participant. This stalemate made many lake residents realize that more intervention was needed for Council to take notice of our concerns and rights.

As a result, I started a petition to gauge support for stricter rules and enforcement. To date 345 people have signed this petition (see accompanying document). Essentially the petition demands that, at the very least, Council strengthen Bylaws regarding noise, fire and general nuisance complaints and enforce these with stiff penalties for failure to comply.

However, we do not believe that simply strengthening existing nuisance Bylaws fully addresses the problem. And this approach would still leave the onus on neighbours to be the “cops”.

Fundamentally, commercial STRs should not be allowed on properties zoned as shoreline residential. We are concerned that if this aspect of the Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw is not enforced, it weakens the Township’s ability to enforce other aspects of its zoning bylaws affecting waterfront properties, to the detriment of our lakes.

If the Township is not prepared to enforce this zoning, we urge it to create a program similar to Kawartha Lakes’ licencing program, which includes enforcement and escalating fines. While Douro-Dummer is not as large as Kawartha Lakes and does not have the same financial base, there could be a proportional effort made to pilot a smaller licensing program, and resources could potentially be shared across Townships to save costs (as is being considered with IT, for example). Licencing would not need to apply to responsible owners who rent their cottagers for a couple of weeks each year to help pay their taxes.

Not every commercial Short-Term Rental owner is irresponsible, and most rural areas aren’t affected by this issue. Therefore, place your strategic resources where the problems are, and consider the revenue opportunities here from licensing fees and fines. Enforcement 24/7 is essential, with escalating fines for repeat offenders and, ultimately, suspension of licences as STRs if there are too many violations.

For the health of our lakes, an essential component of any new approach to regulating STRs must be a thorough inspection of their septic systems and dwellings, with close scrutiny being given to the true number of potential occupants.

Finally, we want to point out that this issue is shared by the other Townships around our lakes, and if Douro-Dummer does not implement strong rules and penalties, more and more STRs will gravitate to our shores from other jurisdictions with stricter bylaws and enforcement.

Thank you for considering our concerns and ideas about this important matter.

Sincerely,  
Tina Warren and Lois Wallace