

**CITY OF BOSTON  
DEPARTMENT OF INNOVATION AND  
TECHNOLOGY**



**SHORT-TERM RENTAL SOFTWARE RFI**

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION EV00005209  
RESPONSE DEADLINE: FRIDAY, MARCH 30TH, 2018 @ 5PM  
BOSTON LOCAL TIME**

*Martin J. Walsh, Mayor*

# I. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

The short-term rental industry offers supplemental income for Boston residents and unique accommodation for visitors. However, with a housing stock heavily weighted towards rental properties, short term rentals, if left unregulated, will oversaturate the housing market and exacerbate housing affordability concerns.

In order to address these concerns without eliminating economic opportunity for residents, the City of Boston is considering an ordinance that will define the terms of allowable short-term rental use and provide for the licensing and regulation of short-term rental units. This would require a software solution to facilitate the registration and renewal of short-term rental units and aid the City in enforcing the ordinance. Before finalizing the ordinance or buying any software, we're starting with this Request For Information (RFI) to learn more from software companies and cities, specifically:

- what existing products and/or custom solutions exist that could meet our needs,
- what a typical budget and timeline looks like for implementation of a Short-Term Rental registration and renewal portal,
- what respondents think in regards to the feasibility of some of the City's intended specifications for a short-term rental registration and renewal portal, and
- **how existing or planned software solutions address or would address the challenge of data exchange with host platforms**

This RFI will supply the City with information that may impact policy regarding short term rentals as well as the procurement and implementation of a software solution that meets the needs of the ordinance.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND

The City proposes to allow certain dwelling units to be registered for use as short-term rental units. An operator of a short-term rental unit must be a natural person who is the owner, lessee, or authorized representative of the owner of the unit. A short-term rental unit allowed under this ordinance must conform fully with one of the following three category specifications:

1. **Limited Share Unit.** A residential unit that is the operator's primary residence, a portion of which is offered as a short-term rental while the operator is present. Occupancy shall be limited to three bedrooms or six guests, whichever is less. Limited Share Units may be offered for 365 days per year.
2. **Home Share Unit.** A residential unit offered as a short-term rental that is the operator's primary residence. Occupancy shall be limited to five bedrooms or ten

guests in a Home Share Unit, whichever is less. Home Share Units may be offered for 365 days per year provided that the total number of booked days during with the operator is not present shall not exceed ninety consecutive or nonconsecutive days per year.

3. **Investor Unit.** A residential unit offered as a short-term rental that is not the primary residence of the operator. Occupancy shall be limited to five bedrooms or ten guests in an Investor Unit, whichever is less. Investor Units may be booked for up to ninety consecutive or nonconsecutive days per year.

The conditions of the ordinance will be enforced by the Housing division of the Inspectional Services Department (ISD). You can review the ordinance [here](#)<sup>1</sup> and learn more about the Inspectional Services Department at [boston.gov/isd](http://boston.gov/isd). Note: The City has filed the proposed ordinance, which will be considered by the Boston City Council during a series of hearings and working sessions, and which may be amended during that legislative process. Respondents should be aware of the potential for this proposal to change and may want to address how a potential solution could adapt to such changes.

## II. RFI OVERVIEW

This RFI is for **informational purposes only**, and no contract will be awarded as a result. A vendor's response to the RFI -- or lack thereof -- will have no impact on the evaluation of responses to any subsequent Request for Proposals (RFP).

Please note that all responses will be public record. **Do not submit confidential information in your response.**

The draft scope of work described herein outlines how we think the City's policy goals would translate into a software platform. We'd like to get your feedback on this draft scope and welcome responses that challenge our vision of an optimal software solution. Please provide your feedback via this Google form: <https://goo.gl/forms/Kcc7QdYEB2yD9DEB2>

As we seek feedback from a variety of entities, respondents to this RFI are invited to provide answers to any or all of the questions in this form.

### CONTACT

Susanna Ronalds-Hannon  
Department of Innovation and Technology, City Hall Room 708  
1 City Hall Square  
Boston, MA 02201  
[str.rfi@boston.gov](mailto:str.rfi@boston.gov)

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.boston.gov/news/new-ordinance-creates-guidelines-regulations-short-term-rentals-boston>

## TIMELINE

Please submit your response to this RFI through the following form by March 30, 2018:

<https://goo.gl/forms/Kcc7QdYEB2yD9DEB2>

## II. DRAFT SCOPE OF WORK

We are looking to identify software solution(s) that include application, workflow, integration to data sources, data and analytics capabilities to enable operators to register and renew short term rental units online, and facilitates enforcement of the conditions of allowable short-term rental use.

An optimal solution would:

- 1. Minimize staff review time by using workflow constraints wherever possible to encode the conditions of short-term rental use**
- 2. Provide a secure, easy-to-use and dependable experience for applicants and staff**
- 3. Interface with existing City-owned data sources and potentially booking platforms to perform consistent identification of rental listings**
- 4. Add value on top of existing City-owned workflow software tools**

The solution could be delivered as a phased deployment, with an early emphasis on registration and, later, on delivery of tools or features that aid in monitoring and enforcement.

## REGISTRATION AND RENEWAL

The solution must include a front-end application for registrants seeking to register, renew, pay for, or otherwise manage their short-term rental units; and a back-end application with configurable workflows for City staff to perform reviews of and modifications to registration records. The application should be able to support up to tens of thousands of registrations. A range of City staff and the public will need access to certain data generated by the application.

Below are some of the functional specifications the City is considering for informing procurement of a short-term rental registration solution. This list is neither comprehensive, nor should any one specification be viewed as conclusive; rather, we seek feedback as to whether respondents view these requirements as *likely feasible* in a planned or existing tool, *conditionally feasible*, or *infeasible*.

## **2.1 Use workflow constraints to encode the conditions of the ordinance**

We expect that implementation of the ordinance will require clerical staff at the Inspectional Services Department to shepherd short-term rental registration applications through a review and payment process. However, the volume of staff time spent on applications prior to issuance is dependent on the extent to which the constraints of short-term rental use are represented in the application's configuration. An advantageous solution would:

1. Allow registrant to select one of the three unit types for registration
2. Allow registrant to identify their role in respect to the unit: owner, tenant, or authorized agent
3. Require data or attachment fields as dependent on role and/or unit type
4. Allow registrant to electronically sign and certify their registration
5. Record and maintain a system-generated registration date, renewal date(s), and expiration date (as a function of registration/renewal date) for each registration.
6. Reflect application status as a function of expiration date.
7. Assign fee amounts as dependent on unit type
8. Assign a unique registration number for each successful registration, to be maintained upon renewal.
9. Identify applications that have the same location as another active registration so that staff users can pursue closure of units that are no longer active and reject duplicate registrations
10. Validate selection of unit location against the City's master addressing database. This both means that an applicant would be restricted to registering their short-term rental at a valid city address, and, in the event that the registrant is applying for multiple registrations in one user session, that the registrant would only be able to register as many units as are associated with the address. This will require interfacing with the City's master Street Address Management system.
11. Disallow selection of units designated as ineligible by ordinance (eligibility criteria discussed below). This may require integration with the City's GIS solution, permitting and violation solution, and other systems / data sources.

## **2.2 Secure, easy-to-use, & dependable experience for applicants and staff**

Broadly, the application should be intuitive and user-friendly for both applicants and staff. Form-filling should be modern, efficient, and easy to use, with clear communication around information required of the applicant, next steps, and cost of registration and renewal. Information and documents should be well organized and easily accessible for staff. It should be clear to both applicants and staff when updates have been made and/or action is required. Administrative tools should be similarly user-friendly. Additionally, and more specifically to short-term rental registration, an advantageous solution would:

12. Allow registrant to select location of unit via type-ahead or map selection

13. Allow registration and renewal of multiple units/registrations in a single session (in the event that registrant is authorized agent for multiple “home share” or “limited share” units or is registering “investor” units)
14. Allow registrants to “close” their registration at any time
15. Allow registrants to amend their stated relationship to the unit with respect to role (owner, tenant, authorized agent) and, by extension, residency, at any time
16. Maintain a copy of the data provided by registrant upon each renewal to serve as a history of the application.
17. Offer varied permission settings for back-end users, including via “open data” services.
18. Include built-in, interactive reporting tools.

### **2.3 Integration with existing systems and data sources**

In order to facilitate registration at valid addresses, the application will need to interface with the City’s master addressing system. In order to accept electronic payment, the application will need to interface with the City’s cashiering and payment processing system. Additionally, not all units may be used for short-term rentals. Eligibility criteria excludes units with the following characteristics:

- classified for non-residential use in the City’s Zoning code.
- designated as below market rate or income restricted
- subject to affordability covenants
- subject by law to housing or rental assistance
- located within a “problem property” as defined by City ordinance
- located within a property owned by an owner of a “problem property”
- subject of three or more findings of violations of the Housing, Sanitary, Building, Fire or Zoning code, among other transgressions

In order to leverage location-based criteria, the application will need to interface with multiple systems and data sources, and be able to reconcile unit and parcel level data. Data from short-term rental registrations will need to be easily associated with the City’s [parcel-level property data](#), maintained by the Assessing department.<sup>2</sup>

Units in violation of the terms of the short-term rental ordinance are subject to enforcement action by ISD. However, given existing software for tracking violations of other City codes/ordinances, and that violations of this ordinance alone may be written against unregistered units, it may not be advantageous for a short-term rental application to contain its own violation tracking system. Furthermore, given that allowed short-term rental use is conditional upon the status of violations of more than the current ordinance under consideration, an application with built-in violation processing would still be required to integrate with the City’s existing system for tracking violations.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://data.boston.gov/organization/assessing-department-org>

We welcome responses that challenge this perspective on tracking violations of the ordinance and are open to alternative approaches.

## **ENFORCEMENT OF CONDITIONS OF SHORT-TERM RENTAL USE**

The City of Boston currently utilizes existing workflow software tools for various permits and licenses that facilitate online application submission, staff reviews, payment processing, and issuance of violations, among other functions. An advantageous proposal is one that adds value to the capabilities of existing tools by addressing challenges to enforcement presented by the ordinance that are not accommodated by existing solutions.

Specifically, for two of the three proposed short-term rental unit types, operators are prohibited from booking the short-term rental unit beyond ninety consecutive or nonconsecutive days.<sup>3</sup> There is no restriction on which calendar days an operator chooses to offer the unit as a short-term rental, as long as no single short-term rental stay exceed thirty consecutive calendar days. Neither of these conditions can be enforced from within a siloed registration and workflow tool, and will require reconciliation with data from external sources, likely booking agents.

Furthermore, in the likely event that agents post their units for advertisement on multiple booking platforms, the City will need a mechanism by which to tie listings and bookings across multiple platforms back to a single registration identifier.

The City is most interested to learn how respondents' existing or planned solutions address these concerns.

The proposed ordinance includes a clause that allows for bulk registration by booking agent, which, should the City reach agreements with host platforms, would enable us to pursue a pass-through registration system. We are interested in learning the requirements for successful pass-through registration systems. Conversely, we are interested in learning more about alternative approaches for enforcing "booked-nights" caps and monitoring compliance with host residency restrictions.

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<sup>3</sup> A Home Share Unit can be offered 365 days per year but beyond ninety consecutive days or nonconsecutive days, the operator must be present during the rental stay, effectively turning the unit into a "Limited Share" on the "off days."