



# City of Whitehorse Short Term Rentals Review Engagement Summary

## Final Report

---

October 2024



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## 1.0 Short Term Rentals Overview

With the rise of Short-Term Rentals (STRs) in Whitehorse, concerns about potential impacts to long-term housing access have grown. The City is reviewing the opportunities and challenges presented by STRs in the community. The City is also reviewing legislation, best practices, and lessons learned from other communities to understand how best to manage STRs in Whitehorse. This includes considering developing regulations around how and where STRs can operate in the community.

Earlier this year, the City's Housing and Land Development Advisory Committee (HLDAC) submitted a report to Council that recommended several STRs management approaches. The report included developing specific use regulations, developing definitions for different types of STRs, regulating where in the city they should be allowed, and requirements for business licenses. In addition to this report, the City conducted external engagement to gather input on the recommendations and additional ideas. The external engagement occurred in July 26 to September 2, 2024, and included interviews and community survey, as well as submissions via letters and phone calls.

## 2.0 External Engagement Overview

A variety of activities were undertaken to gather feedback from the community.

### Interviews

Interviews were conducted with interest and rights holders to gather input on STRs in Whitehorse, including opportunities and challenges. The interviews were conducted virtually between August and September 2024. The Housing and Land Development Advisory Committee provided an initial list of groups to be involved in targeted interviews based on the role and interests they have in short-term and temporary housing in the community. The City provided feedback on additional organizations to invite to participate, and other parties were identified by interviewees or self-identified as having an interest in the topic and requested interviews. The following groups were invited to participate in an interview:

- Connective
- Council of Yukon First Nation
- Government of Yukon
- Kwanlin Dün First Nation
- Neighbourly North
- Northern Vision Development
- Safe at Home
- Ta'an Kwäch'än Council
- Tourism Industry Association
- Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce
- Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition
- Yukon Chamber of Commerce
- Yukon Chamber of Mines
- Yukon Contractors Association
- Yukon Real Estate Association
- Yukon Residential Landlord Association
- Yukon Medical Association

Identified organizations were contacted up to two times via email or telephone to participate in an interview. Overall, 10 interviews were held with representatives of the following organizations:

- Connective
- Council of Yukon First Nation
- Government of Yukon
- Kwanlin Dün First Nation
- Neighbourly North
- Safe at Home
- Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon
- Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce
- Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition
- Yukon Residential Landlord Association

### Online Survey

An online survey was available to gather feedback from the broader community about how residents and visitors experience STRs in Whitehorse and the benefits and concerns relating to STRs in the City. The survey was available on the City website from July 26 to September 2, 2024 and received 1,928 submissions.

The survey was advertised through social media posts that reached of 12,000 people, featured in City News Highlights weekly throughout the survey period, and project subscribers were notified by email.

### Other Feedback

In addition to the interviews and online survey, the City received additional comments through emails and a phone calls.

Feedback provided through interviews, surveys, and other submissions are summarized in the high-level summary.

## 3.0 High-Level Summary of External Engagement

The following section is a high-level summary of themes from the external engagement, which includes what was heard through interviews, surveys, emails, a phone call, and letters received.

### Potential Benefits of STRs

Many people commented on the benefits of having STRs in the City that are advantageous to both operators, users, and the Whitehorse community at large. STRs benefit operators by providing a secondary source of income and offering more flexibility with lengths of stay and general rental agreements between operator and guests compared to long term rentals. Operators can rent out their STRs seasonally, based on their personal schedules and needs, and avoid the challenges of finding suitable candidates for longer term rentals. STRs were also noted to provide diverse housing options to meet community needs.

Many people also noted that STRs are beneficial to users and the City of Whitehorse. Most guests staying in STRs are tourists, visitors, temporary or seasonal workers (e.g. in construction, health care, or people working with First Nations) who rely on STRs for seasonal accommodations. Some people found that STRs provide more comfortable living experiences and options for individuals and families. STRs were also noted to be used by people accessing health care services in Whitehorse or people who require accommodations for emergency situations.

### Potential Concerns of STRs

Although STRs were noted to have many benefits, just as many respondents shared their concerns about their impact in the community. One of the top concerns is the impact of STRs on housing availability and affordability. Some people were concerned or have experienced displacement from their homes as landlords convert long term rental spaces into STRs. A few also shared that STRs are often costly, and tenants do not have the same protection rights as those who live in long term rentals. Others worried about neighbourhood impacts ranging from increases in noise and nuisance; loss of sense of community because of the short-term nature of rentals; increases in pressure on utilities, roads and parking; impacts on neighbourhood safety; and decreasing the value of neighbouring homes. Several respondents

discussed safety issues for STR guests as there is currently a lack of licensing, safety regulations, and inspection on STR spaces.

Many commented that some regulations would help manage concerns around STRs and reduce their impact in the community. Other people thought that having no regulations on STRs gives operators an unfair advantage in the accommodation sector. A minority of respondents wanted STRs to be banned completely from the City.

### STR Management in the City

Many agree that removing STRs from Whitehorse would do more harm than good for the City; however, most agree that STRs require some regulations to minimize the negative impacts it poses on the rental market, housing market and homelessness. For example, several people noted that long term rental costs have gone up because STRs have removed longer term housing options. Conversely, a few respondents stated that removing STRs from the City would increase long term rental costs and are concerned that the City is overstepping by regulating the STR industry. Many people point to looking at other municipalities and learning from other jurisdictions to develop a best-practices framework.

The following summarizes the level of support towards the proposed potential options<sup>1</sup> for managing STRs in Whitehorse based on survey submissions:

- Responses were closely split on whether anything should be done to regulate STRs with 36% supporting the status quo of having no regulations and 39% in favour of implementing regulations on STRs.
- 52% of respondents did not support limiting the number of days per year an STR can be available for rent while 32% did support it.
- 47% supported limiting the number of STRs in residential neighbourhoods whereas 38% did not support it.
- 57% supported requiring businesses to post licensing information in listings/advertisements whereas 23% were not in support.
- 64% supported the idea that operators should require a business license from the City on an annual basis, with 24% opposing this management tool.
- 45% of respondents supported allowing short-term rentals in residential zones, even if the owner does not live on the same parcel, while 45% were opposed.
- More than half of respondents (52%) favored allowing short-term rentals (STRs) in residential zones if the owner resides on the same property. Conversely, 33% opposed the idea.
- 60% did not support restricting STRs to only commercial zones whereas a quarter of respondents (25%) were in support of this option.
- 46% of people did not support only allowing STRs on properties where the owner lives in the principal residence while 43% were in support.
- 38% were not in support of establishing two definitions<sup>2</sup> whereas 41% were in support of the definitions.

<sup>1</sup> No decisions have been made. Several options were presented to gather feedback from the community.

<sup>2</sup> The definitions were that 1) Primary STR which would be permitted in commercial zones as a principal use; and 2) Secondary STR which would be permitted in residential zones as a secondary use and the owner would need to reside on the same parcel).



## ■ 4.0 Short Term Rentals Interviews

As part of engagement, we heard from operators, residents, and users to better understand the overall impacts and benefits of STRs in the community by asking about experiences and thoughts on STRs throughout Whitehorse. The questions included asking about the connections to STRs, the impacts that STRs have on the community, if any, individual experiences, opportunities, and ideas. The detailed outline of interview questions can be found in **Appendix A**. The interviewees provided a variety of perspectives on STRs in Whitehorse. The interested parties that were interviewed shared mixed, sometimes opposing feedback on STRs; however, the desire to limit homelessness and provide solutions was shared amongst all interviewees.

The summary below outlines key themes that emerged from feedback provided through the targeted interviews that were conducted with interested parties.

- **Housing Shortage:** There is a shortage of housing in Whitehorse in general which has not kept up with population growth. STRs reduce long-term rental options and provide temporary solutions.
- **Need for STRs:** There is a need for STRs as they play an important role in short-term and temporary housing in the community. Examples of people who use short-term rentals include seasonal and short-term workers, patients travelling from remote communities for medical services, and medical professions staying for extended periods of time. Interviewees also shared that STRs provide immediate emergency housing options.
- **Tourism Impact:** STRs are essential for accommodating visitors and supporting the tourism-driven economy in Whitehorse which is a major part of the City's overall economy. Too much regulation and restrictions on STRs could harm the tourism industry.
- **Need for Regulation:** Regulations for STRs are needed. These regulations could include permitting and business licenses. Along with regulation, there needs to be effective inspection and enforcement options in place.
- **Diverse Housing Options:** A variety of housing solutions are needed to meet community needs. Many residents are over housed and innovative solutions, such as renting out unused bedrooms, or using vacant winter residences for STRs provides housing options and flexibility.
- **Accessibility and Cost:** While STRs fulfill important roles, they are often expensive and not accessible to all. This raises concerns for low-income individuals and the organizations that support them.
- **Unique Context of Whitehorse:** The role of STRs in Whitehorse should be evaluated independently instead of compared to other communities that do not have the same challenges and qualities as Whitehorse (e.g., Whitehorse should not be compared to Vancouver). Lessons learned in more comparable communities with STR success stories should be used as an example to guide STR growth and regulation.
- **Community and Infrastructure Challenges:** The location of STRs should be considered from a zoning approach, STRs should be encouraged in areas that are more accessible and within proximity to services. STRs in remote locations have accessibility challenges. The existing transportation system in Whitehorse makes accessibility challenging.
- **Financialization:** The financialization of STRs raises concerns about their impact on the housing market and low-income residents, residents who are homeless, and the corresponding supportive services. Regulation is needed to ensure transparency.

- **Health and Safety Regulations:** Effective regulations that guide and ensure health and safety are needed. Health and safety regulations that exist for hotels and bed and breakfasts should be considered for STRs.
- **Tenancy Act:** Residents that use STRs for extended stays are not protected by the Tenancy Act.
- **Public Funding Considerations:** Although some respondents said that STRs offer housing options for vulnerable populations in Whitehorse, other interviewees felt that the City should support existing non-profits and social services that address housing for vulnerable populations instead of relying on STRs.

## 5.0 Online Survey

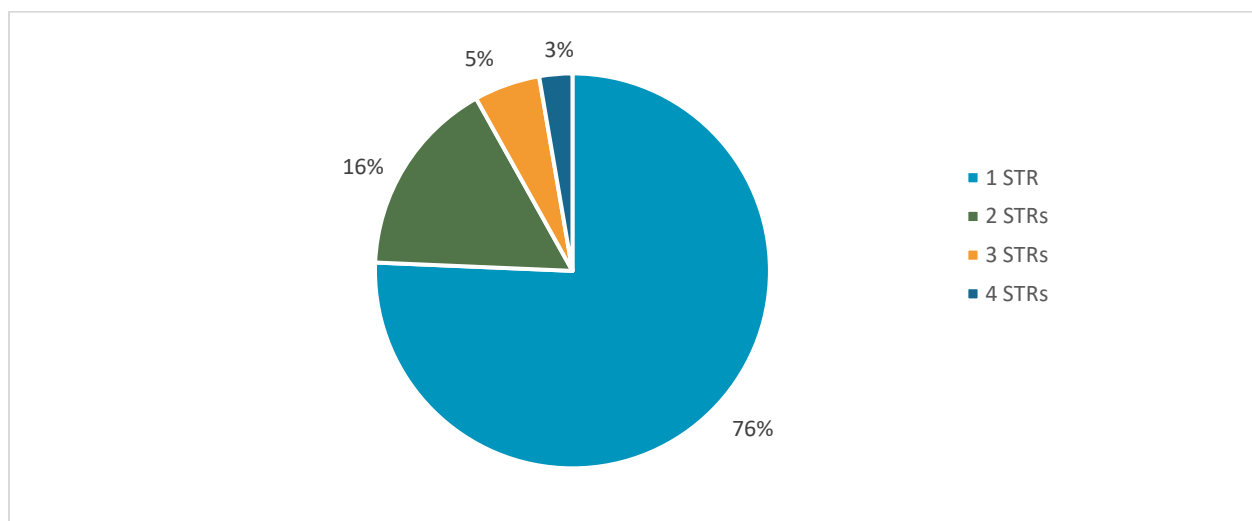
Community members, consisting of permanent and seasonal residents of Whitehorse, and some visitors to the City shared feedback on STRs in Whitehorse. Operators of STRs also responded to questions relating to the STRs they operate. The following section is a summary of what we heard through the survey.

### 5.1 Operators of Short Term Rentals (self-identified)

#### Number of STRs in Whitehorse

Participants were asked to share the number of STRs they currently operate in Whitehorse. Although 158 respondents noted that they currently operate a STR, 39 operators<sup>3</sup> shared information about the STRs they operate. Roughly 76% of those who responded have one STR in operation, with the remaining having two to four STRs.

Figure 5.1: How many STR(s) do you currently operate in Whitehorse?



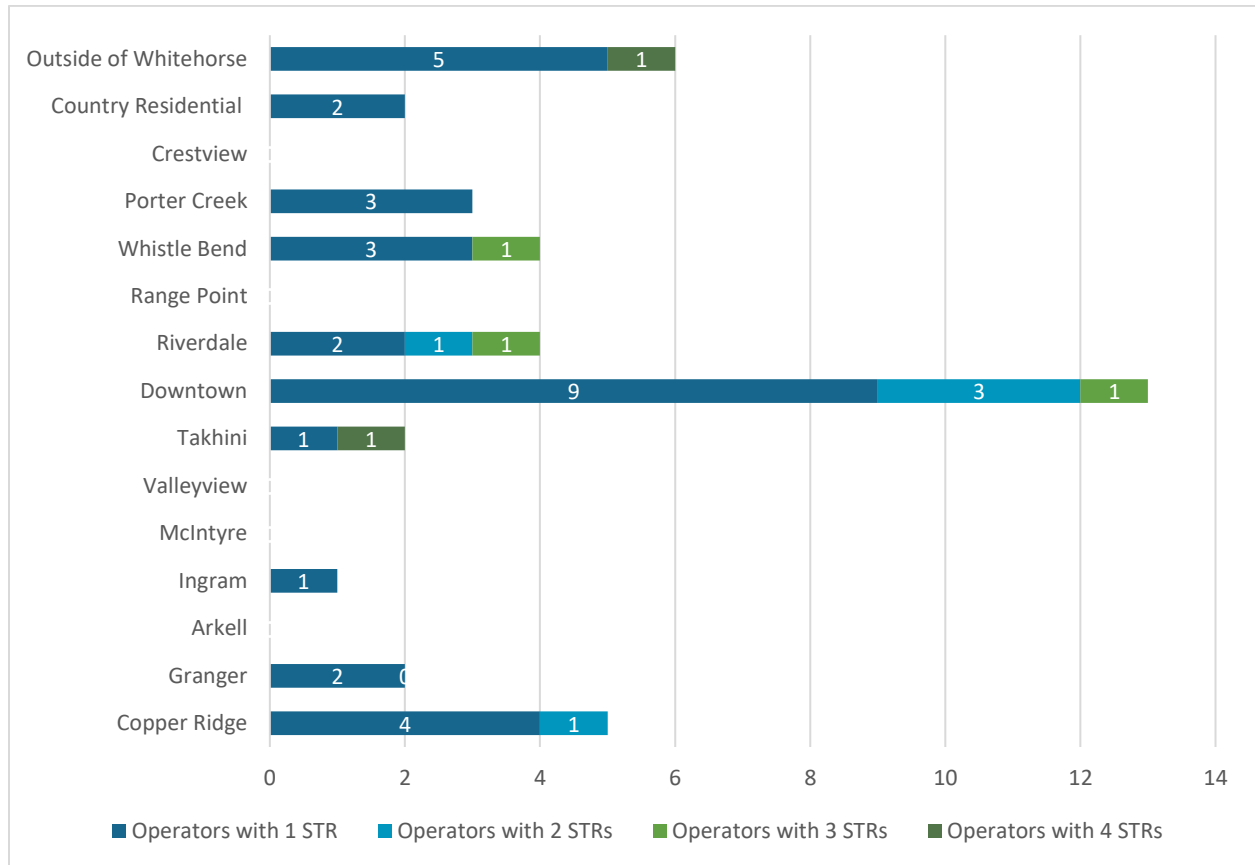
Responses: 37

<sup>3</sup> Due to a Survey Monkey skip logic error, only those who selected “current STR operator” as their single response were able to respond to questions asked in this section (5.1) relating to their operations.

## Neighbourhoods where STRs are located

Except for Crestview, Range Point, Valleyview, McIntyre, and Arkell, respondents reported having at least one STR in all other neighborhoods listed. Most are located in downtown Whitehorse and most people operated one STR.

Figure 5.2: What neighbourhood(s) do you operate your STR(s)? Please indicate the number of STRs if you operate more than one.



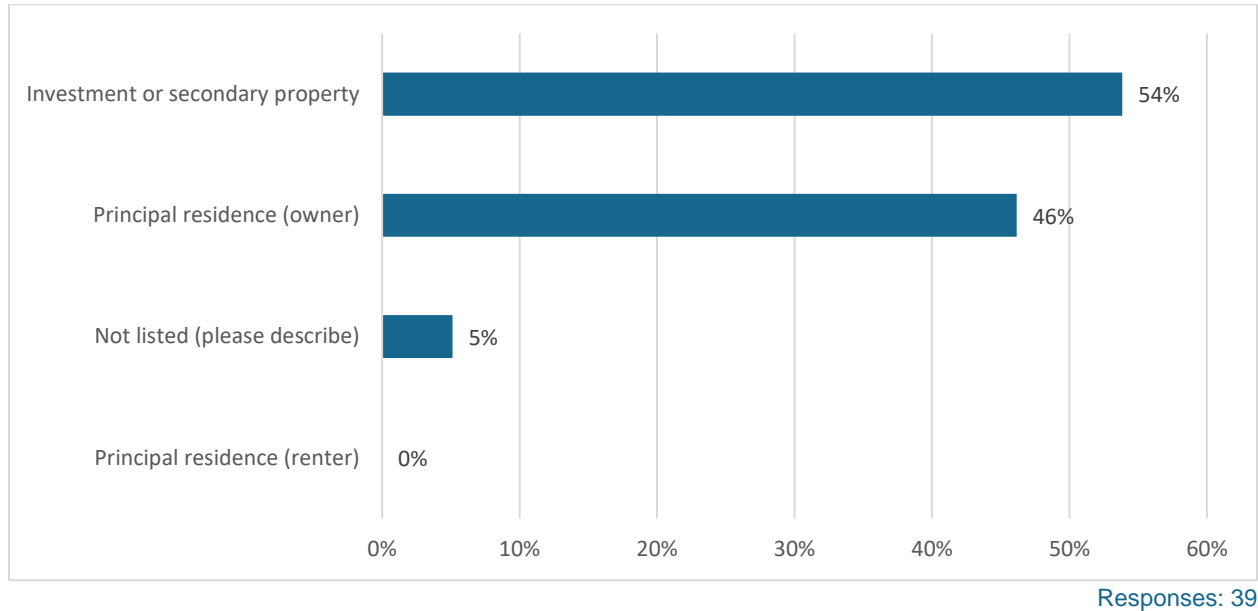
Responses: 37



### Where STRs are operated

We asked operators where they operate their STR(s). Over half (54%) of those who responded operate their STR(s) as an investment or secondary property and close to half (46%) operate as a principal residence (owner).

Figure 5.3: Where do you operate the STR(s)? Select all that apply.



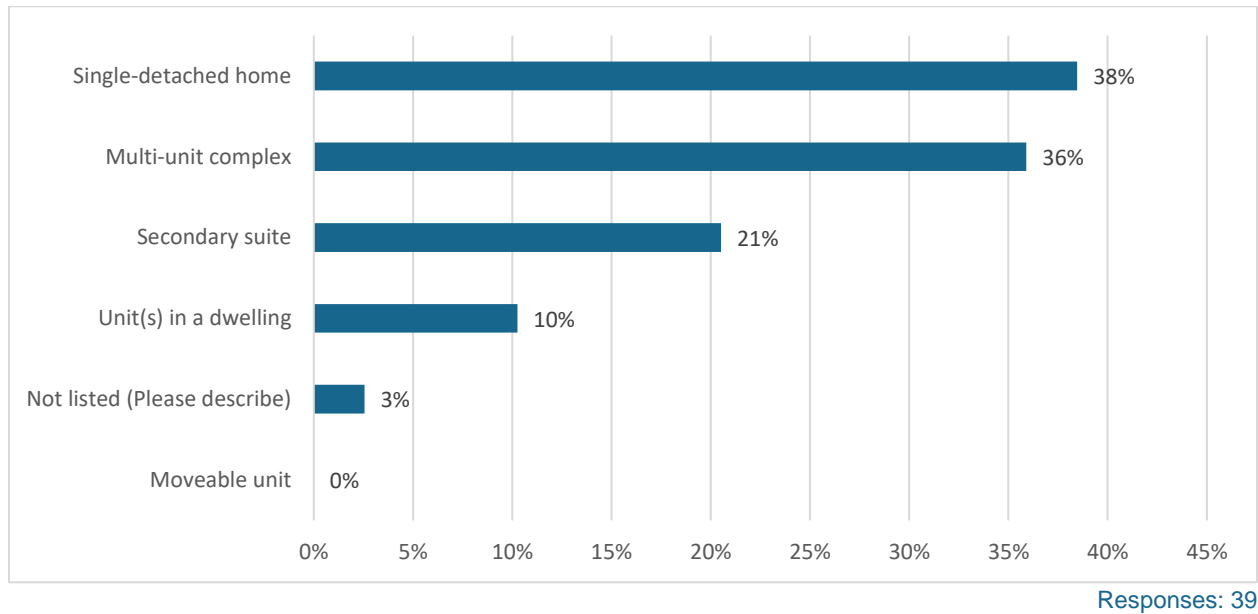
#### Other responses

- Commercial accommodation
- Formerly a principal residence

### Dwelling Type

We asked operators to share the type of dwelling they operate as a STR. Of those who responded, over a third operate their STR(s) in single-detached homes (38%), and another third operate in multi-unit complexes (36%). A small percentage operate their STR(s) in dwellings that were not listed but no operators clarified the dwelling type.

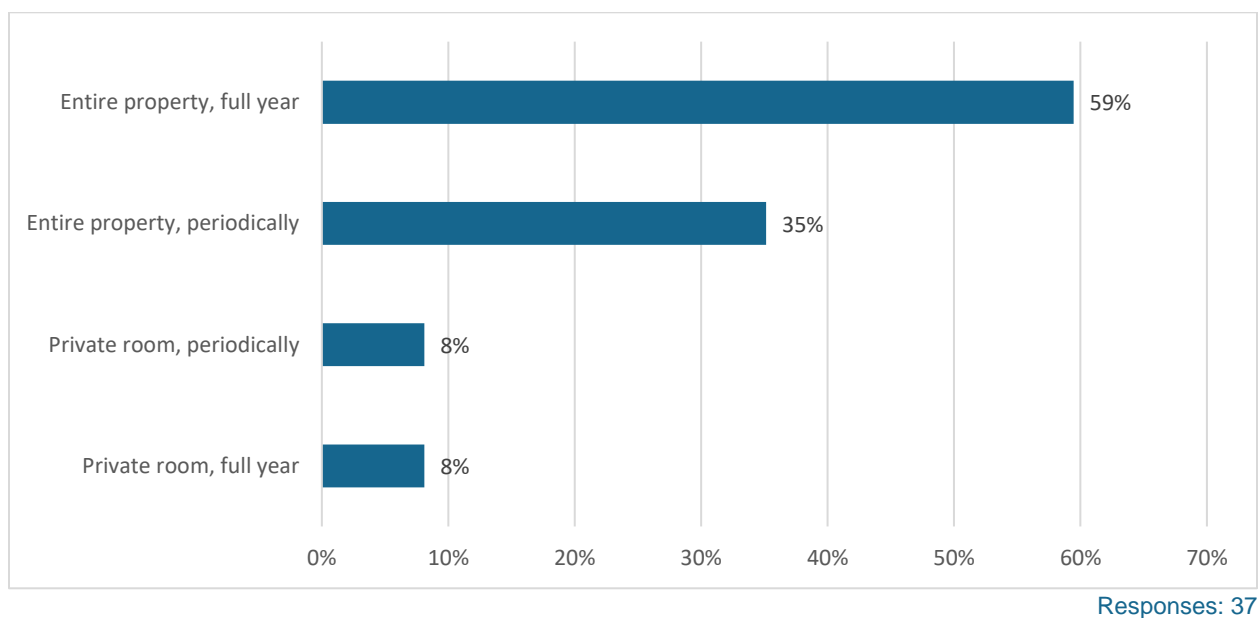
Figure 5.4: What type of dwelling is/are the STR(s) operated in? Select all that apply.



### Nature of STR

We asked operators to indicate what description best describes the nature of the STR(s) they operate. 59% of respondents operate an entire property that is available year-round.

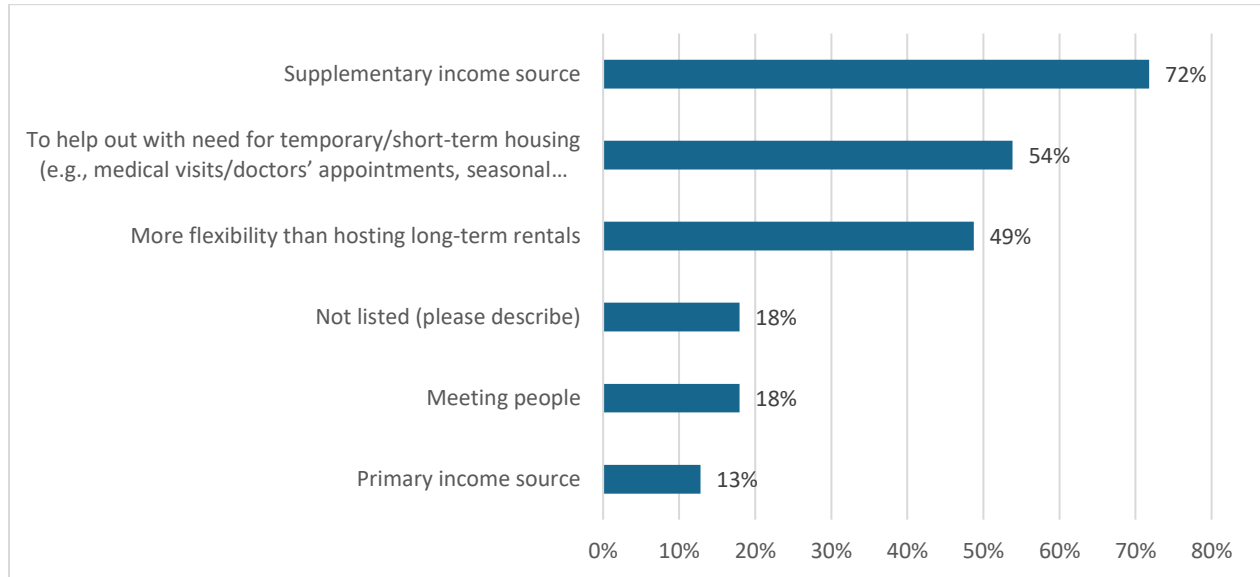
Figure 5.5: Which best describes the nature of the STR(s) you operate? Select all that apply.



## Rationale for Operating

We asked operators to share the key reasons for being an STR operator. 72% noted that it was a supplementary income source. Over half of respondents (54%) said it was to meet the need for temporary/short-term housing and 49% said it was more flexible than hosting long-term rentals.

Figure 5.6: What are the key reasons for being an STR operator? Select all that apply.



Responses: 39

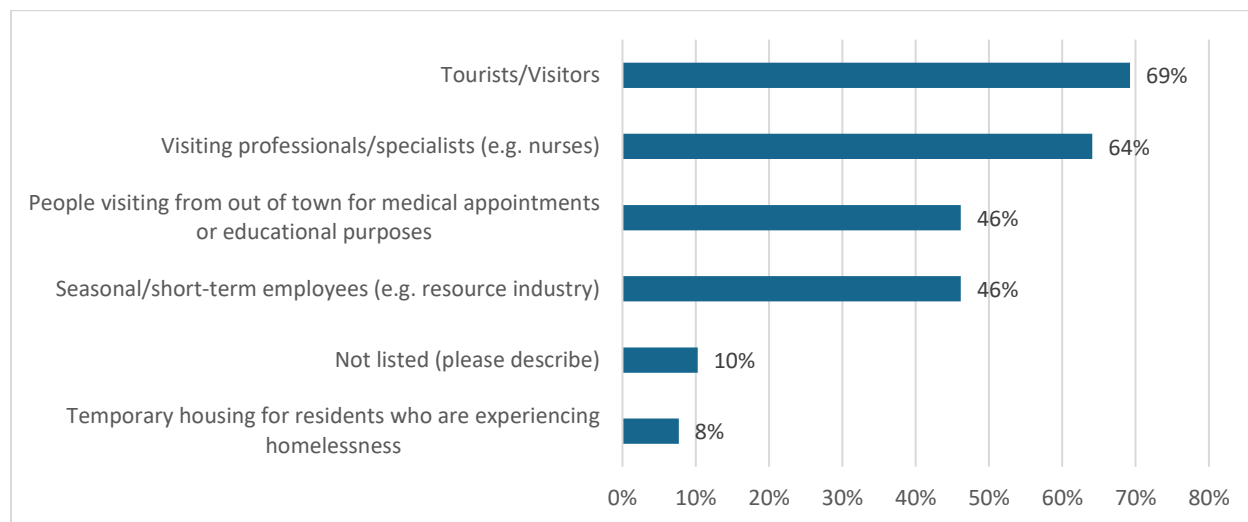
Other reasons not listed

- Provide accommodations for large families

## Typical Guests in the STR(s)

We asked operators to share the usual guests renting their STR(s). 69% noted that their guests were tourists or visitors to Whitehorse while 64% of guests are visiting professionals or specialists.

Figure 5.7: Based on your operator experiences, who are your usual guests in your STR(s)?



Responses: 39

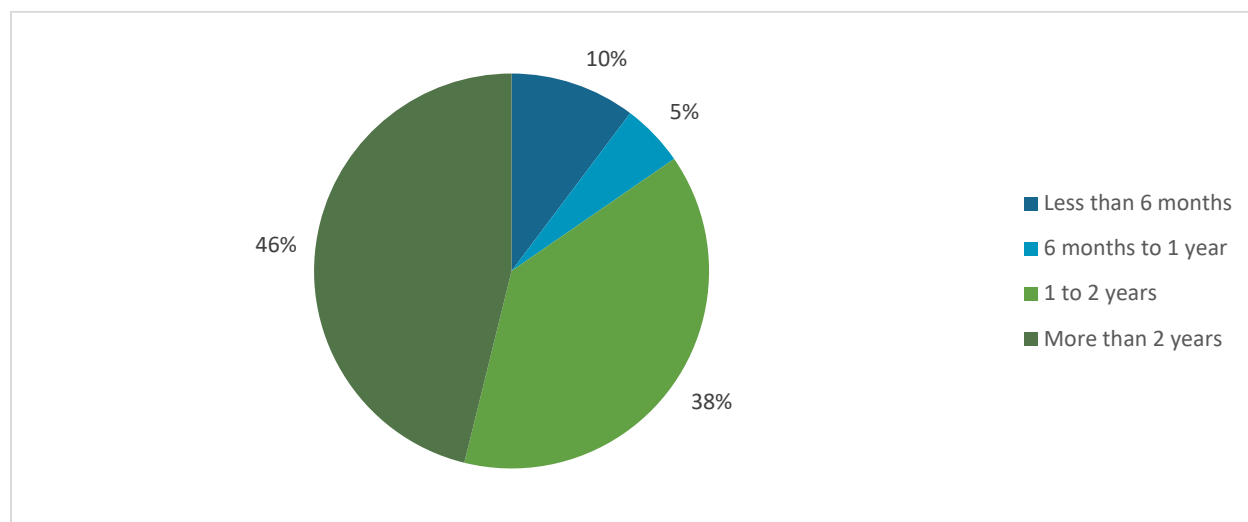
Other reasons not listed:

- All of the above options
- Families

### Length of Time as an Operator

We asked operators to share how long they have been operating the STR(s). Close to half of those responding (46%) have operated for more than two years while 38% have only been operating for 1-2 years.

Figure 5.8: How long have you been operating the STR(s)?

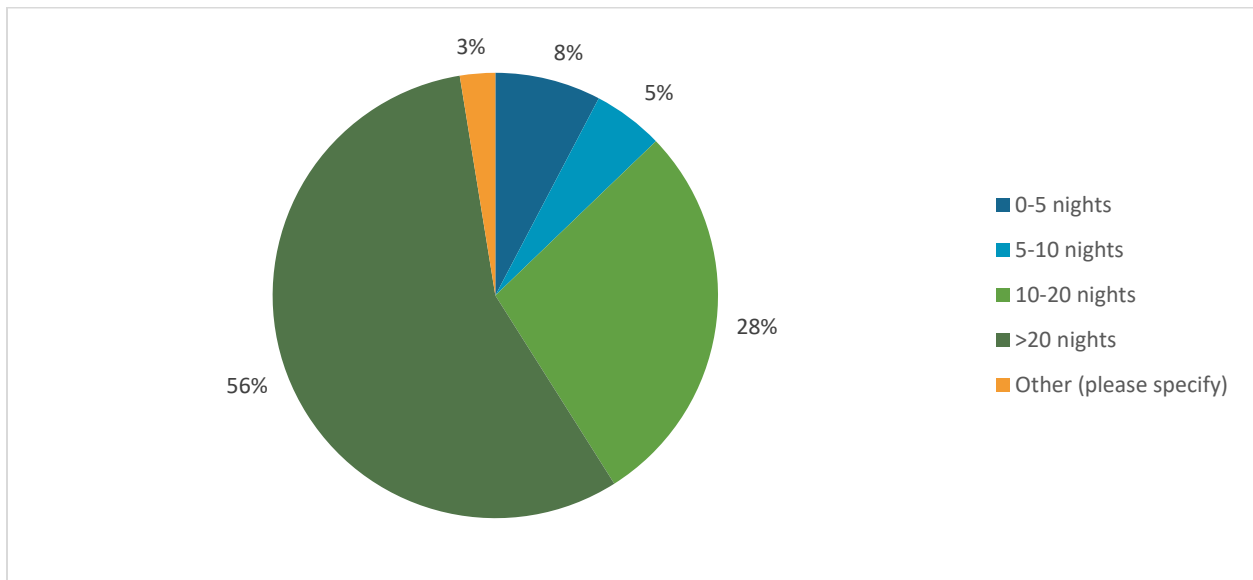


Responses: 39

## Length of Stay

We asked operators to share how many nights their STR(s) are typically occupied by guests in a month. Over half of respondents (56%) said their STR is typically occupied for over 20 nights.

Figure 5.9: In a typical month, how many nights is/are your STR(s) occupied by guests?



Responses: 39

Other reasons not listed:

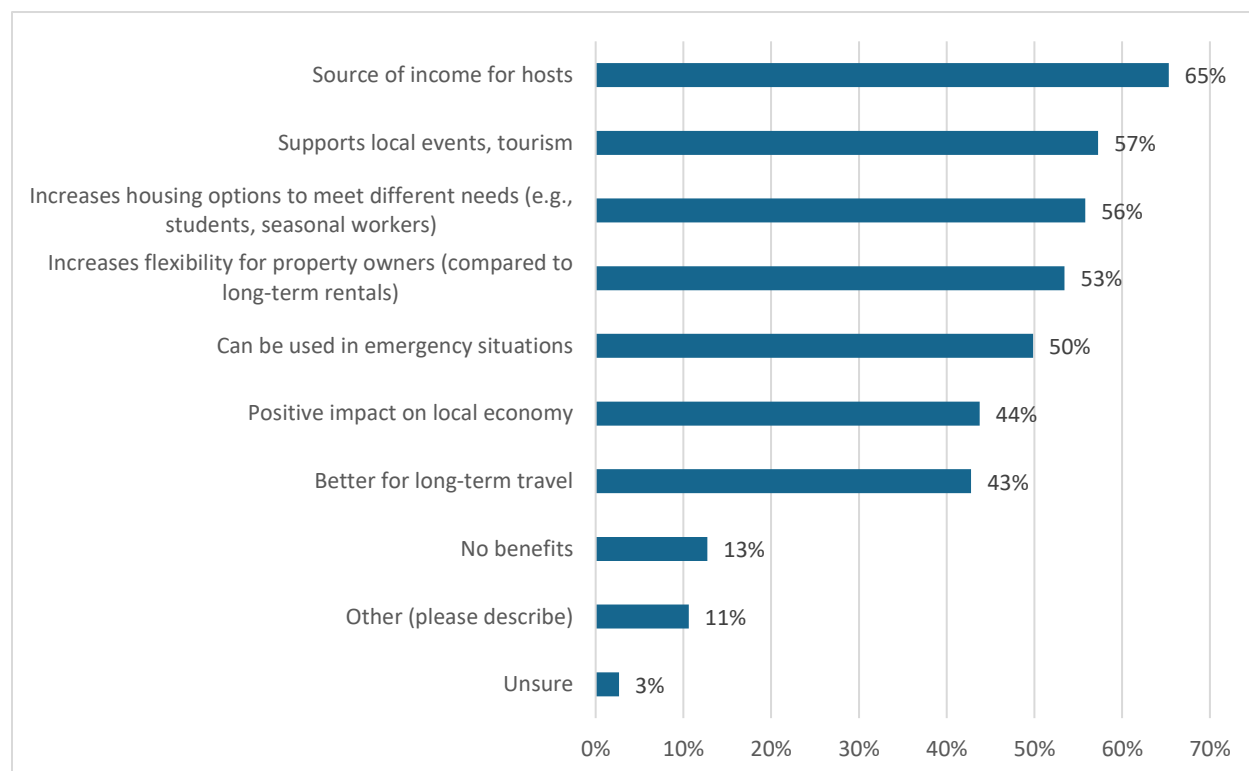
- Depends on the season

## 5.2 Benefits and Concerns of Short Term Rentals (all respondents)

### Benefits of STRs in Whitehorse

We asked people to share potential benefits, if any, they see with STRs in Whitehorse. The majority saw many potential benefits to STRs, with the top three including additional source of income for hosts (65%), supporting local tourism (57%), and increasing housing options to meet different needs (56%).

Figure 5.10: What, if any, potential benefits do you see with STRs in Whitehorse? Select all that apply.



Responses: 1830

#### Other responses:

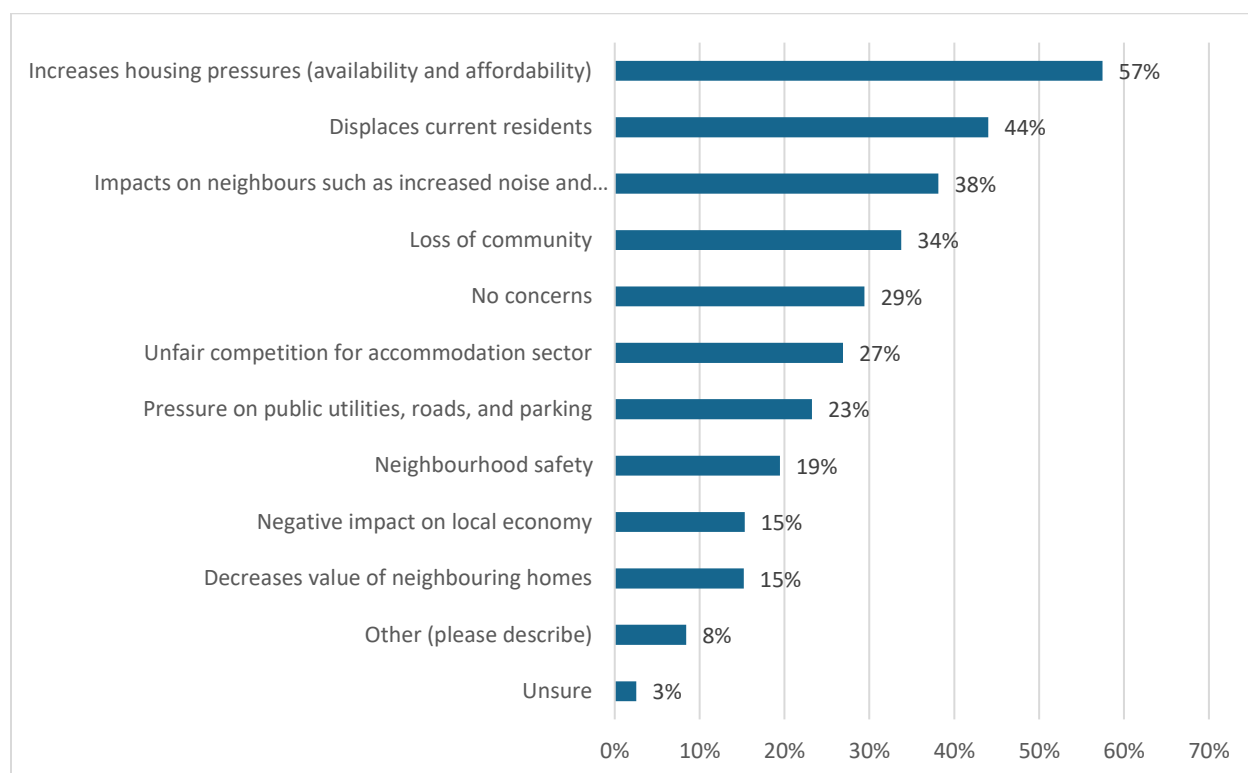
- STRs are preferred over hotels as it is more cost effective, more options/availability and people feel more comfortable in STR accommodations
- Better suited for families
- STRs provide full kitchen and living space
- Important for people accessing medical services and moving/visiting for work

### Concerns of STRs in Whitehorse

We asked people to identify potential concerns, if any, they see with STRs in Whitehorse. Over half of those who responded were concerned with potential increases in housing pressures (e.g., availability and affordability) (57%), the displacement of current residents (44%), and the potential impacts on neighbours, such as increase noise and nuisances (38%).



Figure 5.11: What, if any, potential concerns with STRs do you see in Whitehorse? Select all that apply.



Responses: 1804

#### Other responses

- Lack of licensing, safety regulations and inspection
- STRs owned and operated by people who are out-of-province
- Concerns that STRs are being used for criminal activity

#### Managing STRs in Whitehorse

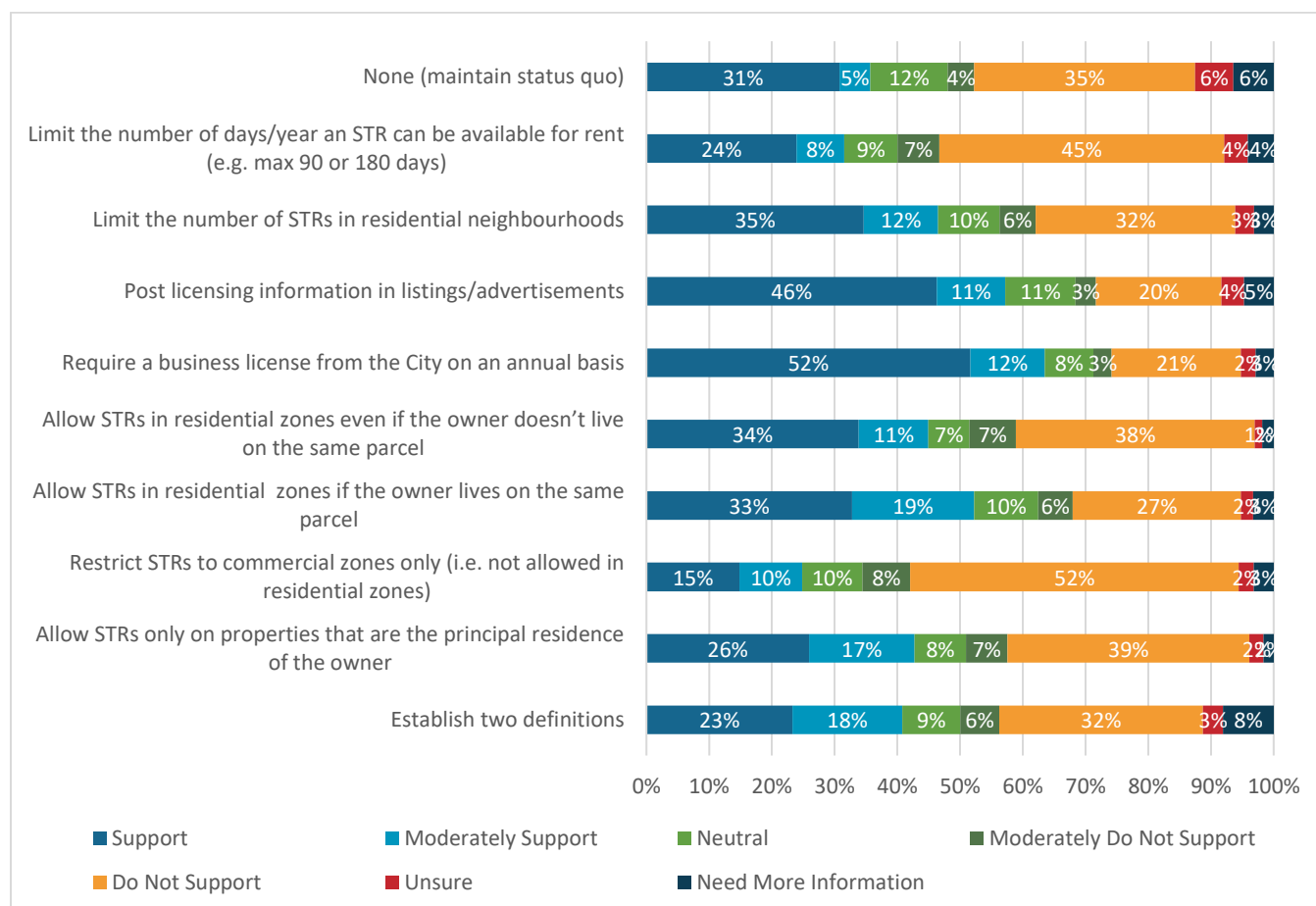
We asked people to indicate their level of support for a range of potential options to regulate STRs. The following summarizes the level of support towards the proposed potential options<sup>4</sup> based on survey submissions:

- Responses were closely split on whether anything should be done to regulate STRs with 36% supporting the status quo of having no regulations and 39% in favour of implementing regulations on STRs.
- 52% of respondents did not support limiting the number of days per year an STR can be available for rent while 32% did support it.
- 47% supported limiting the number of STRs in residential neighbourhoods whereas 38% did not support it.
- 57% supported requiring businesses to post licensing information in listings/advertisements whereas 23% were not in support.

<sup>4</sup> No decisions have been made. Several options were presented to gather feedback from the community.

- 64% supported the idea that operators should require a business license from the City on an annual basis, with 24% opposing this management tool.
- 45% of respondents supported allowing short-term rentals in residential zones, even if the owner does not live on the same parcel, while 45% were opposed. More than half of respondents (52%) favored allowing short-term rentals (STRs) in residential zones if the owner resides on the same property. Conversely, 33% opposed the idea.
- 60% did not support restricting STRs to only commercial zones whereas a quarter of respondents (25%) were in support of this option.
- 46% of people did not support only allowing STRs on properties where the owner lives in the principal residence while 43% were in support.
- 38% were not in support of establishing two definitions<sup>5</sup> whereas 41% were in support of the definitions.

Figure 5.12: Please indicate your level of support for the following ways to manage STRs which could be considered in Whitehorse



Responses: 1730

<sup>5</sup> The definitions were that 1) Primary STR which would be permitted in commercial zones as a principal use; and 2) Secondary STR which would be permitted in residential zones as a secondary use and the owner would need to reside on the same parcel).

Other responses:

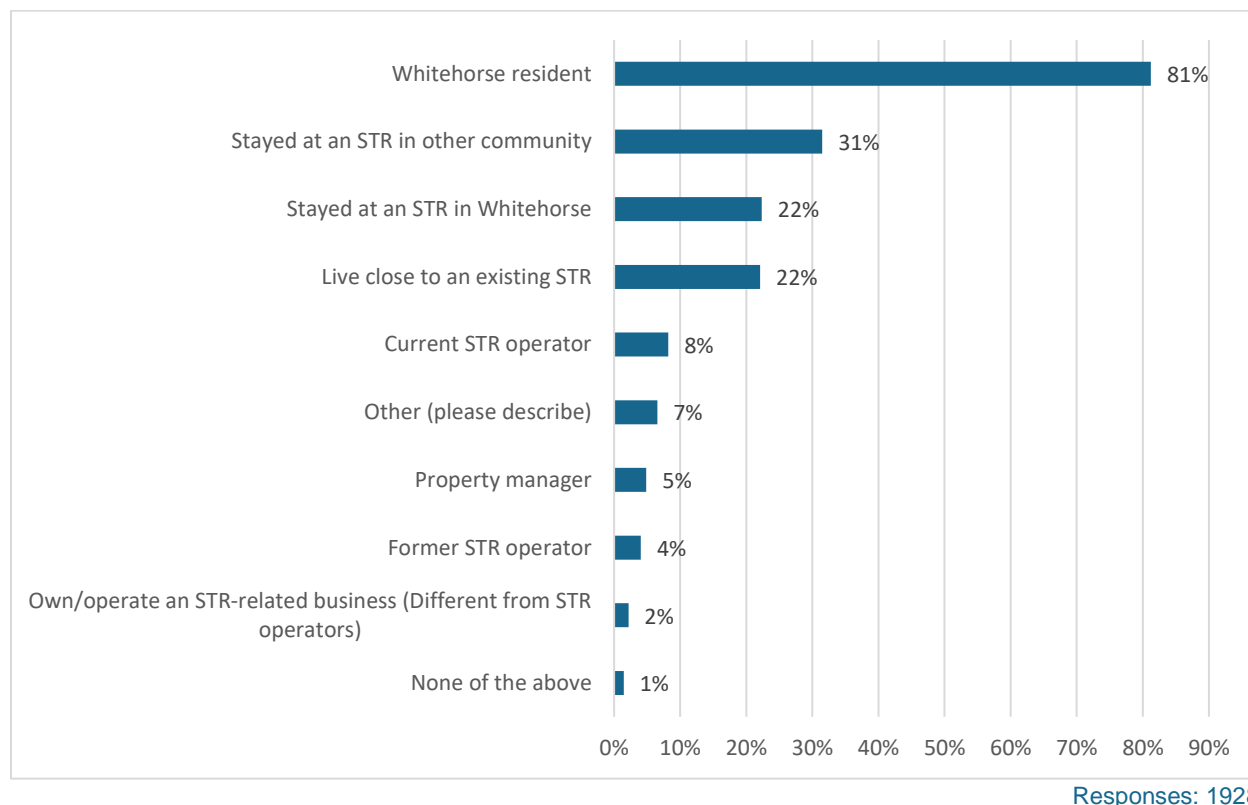
- Housing availability and affordability unrelated to STRs
- Do not support STRs in Whitehorse
- Enforcement and compliance of regulations

### Additional Feedback

We asked people to share if they have any other additional comments or feedback on STRs that they would like the City to consider. The feedback was mixed, with many reiterating the benefits and concerns of STRs in Whitehorse. Although many commented that STRs provide benefits to the City, just as many respondents wanted to see more action in addressing their concerns noted in previous sections of the survey. Only a few people commented that they wanted no government involvement in STRs and conversely, a few others wanted STRs to be banned completely; however, these comments were of the minority.

## 5.3 Demographics

Figure 5.13: Which of the following applies to you today in Whitehorse? Select all that apply.

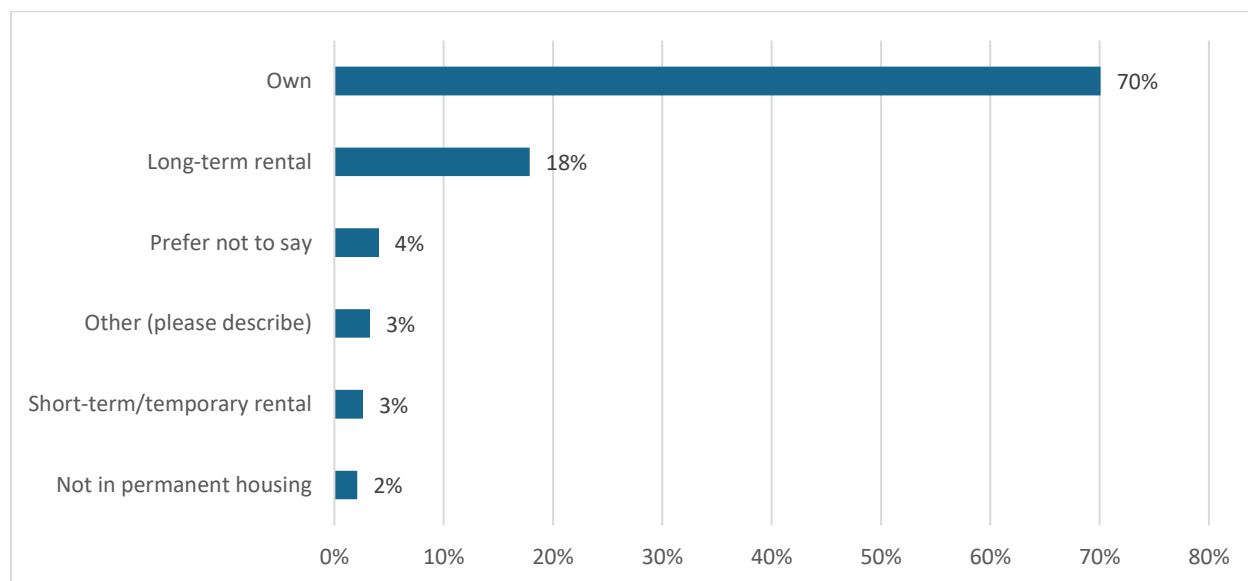


Other responses include:

- Renters and owners of a home
- Short-term and long-term renters or owners
- Community resident or seasonal worker who relies on STRs in Whitehorse

- Prospective STR operators
- Unhoused persons
- Former Whitehorse residents
- Resident outside of Whitehorse
- Hotel operators

Figure 5.14: Which of the following best describes your housing situation?

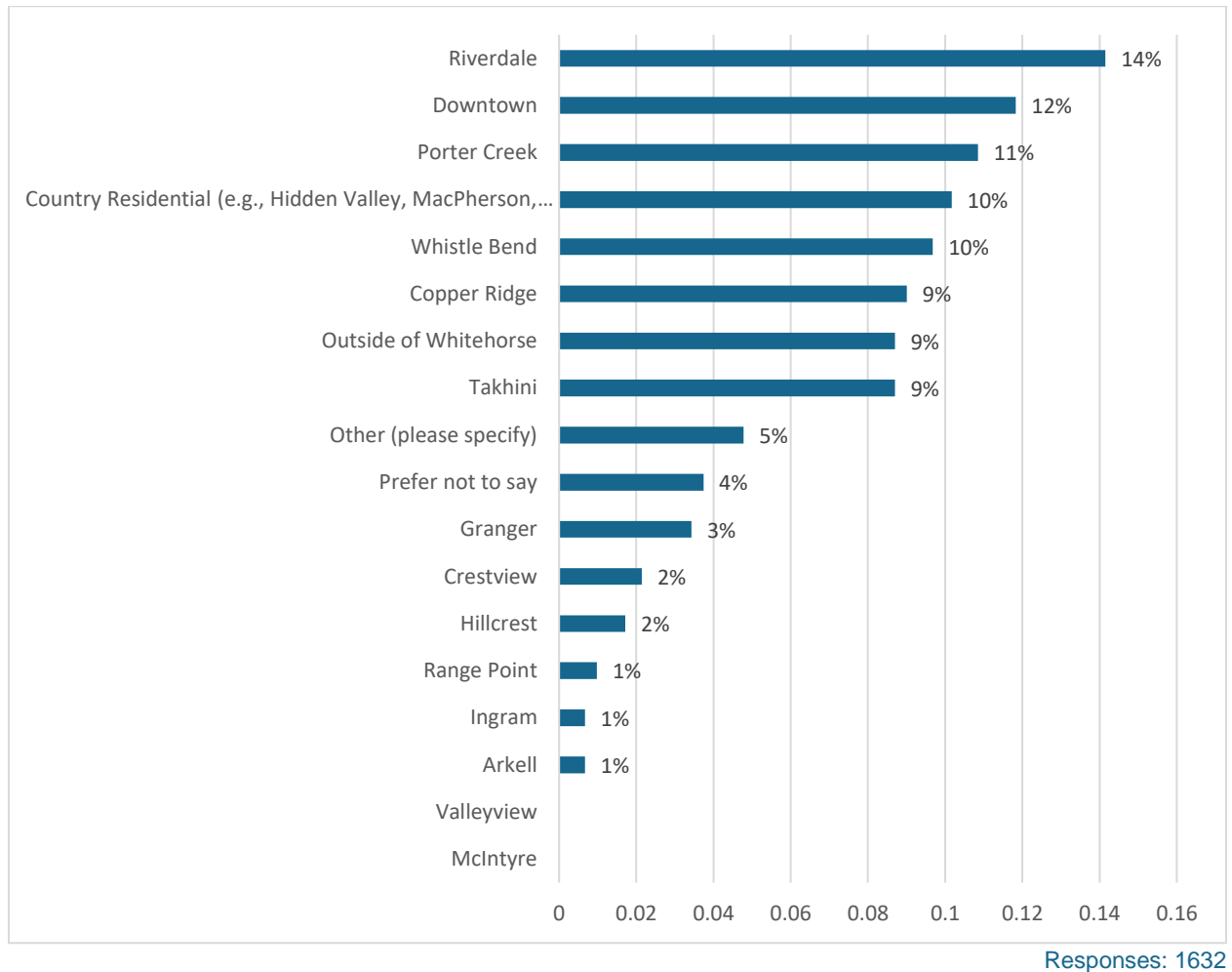


Responses: 1718

Other responses include:

- Visitors to Whitehorse
- Live or own a home outside of Whitehorse
- Live in a trailer or temporary home in Whitehorse
- Live in a home that is owned by someone else in their household
- Unhoused
- Live in student housing at the Yukon University
- Live in First Nation housing

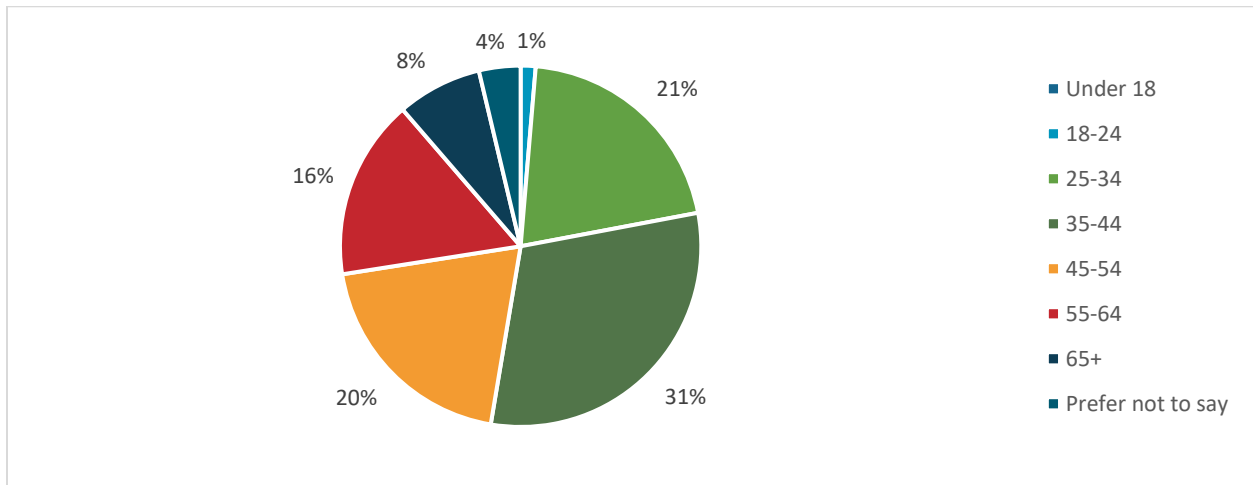
Figure 5.15: What part of Whitehorse do you primarily reside?



#### Other responses

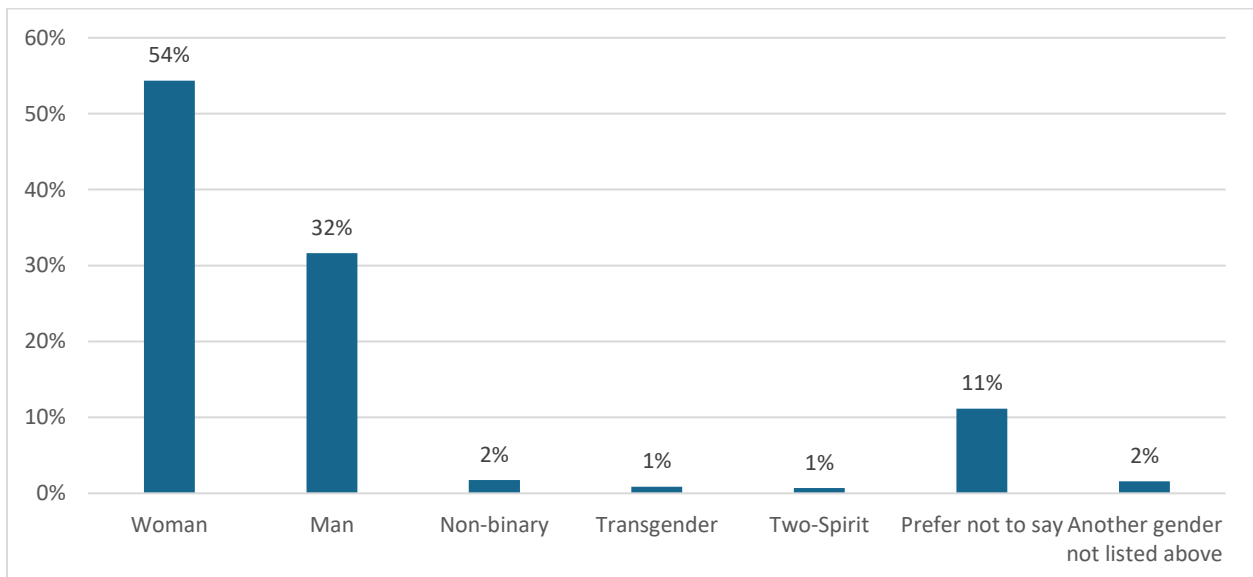
- Former residents of Whitehorse
- Residents of the Yukon
- Visitors to Whitehorse
- Residents of other provinces

Figure 5.16: Please select your age group.



Responses: 1721

Figure 5.17: What gender do you identify as? Choose all that apply.



Responses: 1711

#### Other responses

- Agender
- Genderqueer



## 6.0 Next Steps

Feedback provided through engagement (consisting of survey responses; written feedback through emails, letters and phone calls; and interviews with STR operators, local employers, housing providers, tourism operators, and other affected parties), along with best practices research and a technical review will inform the development of recommendations for potential regulation framework to manage STRs in Whitehorse. This could include changes to City bylaws and processes.



## APPENDIX

### City of Whitehorse Short Term Rentals Review - Stakeholder Interviews

# A

## Short Term Rental Interview Questions

1. What is your and/or your organization's connection to short-term rentals?
2. How does the STR market impact you and/or your organization and what are your/your organization's experiences of the STR market?
3. What are your perceptions—positive, negative, mixed—of the short-term rental market in Whitehorse overall (i.e., including beyond the extent to which it impacts you/your organization)?
4. Is there anything unique about Whitehorse's STR market (e.g., social, economic, demographic context), that has led to a particular context for STRs, or unique challenges or opportunities?
5. What are the biggest challenges on the horizon that will need to be addressed when it comes to STRs? What is needed to overcome these challenges?
6. What are the biggest opportunities for Whitehorse to consider regarding the STR market?
7. The City is exploring options for regulations to help manage the opportunities and potential impacts of STRs in Whitehorse. How, if at all, do you believe STRs should be managed in Whitehorse (ex, restrict STRs only to properties that are the principal residence)?
8. Do you have anything else you would like to share about STRs in Whitehorse