

To Airbnb or not to Airbnb?

January 16, 2015 2:00 AM Jamie Logan
newwave@tulane.edu



The Big Issue panelists debated short-term rental options in New Orleans and whether they are good for the economy or whether they are ruining community neighborhoods, such as the French Quarter. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The resurgence of tourism in New Orleans has inundated the city with a landslide of guests and a swamp of questions. [Tulane Hillel](#) opened its doors on Thursday (Jan. 15) to present The Big Issue, a panel debate series designed to address one such question: is there room for the addition of short-term rentals such as [Airbnb](#) in the landscape of lodging options?

“We want to have local accountability,” said Polly Hardie, president of the Alliance for Neighborhood Prosperity. She and property owner Eric Bay defended off-the-beaten-path rental options that promise a glimpse into the soul of the city.

Lisa Suarez, president of the Faubourg Marigny Improvement Association, stood firmly on the opposing side, arguing that the community has been ruined by rental homes that remain vacant for much of the year.

“Truly, there's been a certain amount of evisceration of neighbors,” Suarez said.

The discussion became emotionally charged when audience members spoke up about how short-term rentals affected them and their neighborhoods. Many denounced rentals for operating outside of public health and safety regulations. But others defended them, saying that vacation sites are good for the economy and provide a use for previously blighted buildings.

In the end, the two sides came to agree upon a single point. No one-size-fits-all approach can be applied to a place as diverse as New Orleans. Progress, the panelists said, will begin when the city creates fair legislation that treats rental properties in the same manner as hotels and traditional beds and breakfasts.

“The tentative steps that we could take are really on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis,” said Rafe Rabalais, project manager of Gulf Coast Housing Partnership. This, he suggested, is where the process should begin.

Jamie Logan is a sophomore majoring in English, psychology and early childhood education at Tulane University.

“The tentative steps that we could take are really on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis.” —Rafe Rabalais, project manager of Gulf Coast Housing Partnership