

STVR FAQs: What the Data Says

Drawing on City and open source documents, this answers questions on location, growth, impact (tax revenue and infrastructure), and regulation.

How many STVRs are registered in the City?

There are 1,559 registered STVRs. Since August 1, when discussions about the moratorium began, 202 STVRs were registered.¹

How many registered STVRs are located in residential areas?

There are 751 registered STVRs in residential areas (Zones R-1, R-1-B, and R-2), 606 in commercial areas (Zones C-1, C-1/SE, C-2, E-C, and PUD), and 202 in mixed use areas (Zone R-T). There are a total of 2,021 housing units in residential zones. Therefore, STVRs constitute 37% of the housing units in residential areas.

What percentage of housing units in the City are used as STVRs?

There are between 3,208 and 3,441 housing units in the City.² There are 1,559 registered STVRs. The percentage of STVRs is 45% to 48%.

How much have STVRs increased in the City?

In 2016, the Carrying Capacity Study estimated there were 1,200 STVRs in the City. Currently, there are 1,559 registered STVRs, including 202 that registered since August 1, 2021. If the Carrying Capacity Study estimate is accurate, this is an increase of 30%. The number of STVRs on July 31 (1,356) would be an increase of 13%.

How much has STVR occupancy increased?

In 2016, the Carrying Capacity Study estimated the average number of persons per STVR unit to be 5. Estimating total STVR units to be 1,200, the Carrying Capacity Study estimated maximum rental occupancy to be 6,000.³ At the start of the moratorium, 1,559 STVRs were registered with a total occupancy of 12,153 or an average of 7.8 per unit.⁴ This means the maximum overnight STVR occupancy has more than doubled.

How much tax revenue does the City receive from the Hotel/Motel excise tax, which includes STVRs?

¹ "City of Tybee Open Records Request-Bedrooms Occupancy (Short-Term Vacation Rental Registration List)" (Tybee Island, GA: Obtained through Georgia Open Records Act, 2021).

² "Savannah Area GIS Open Data," accessed October 3, 2021, <https://data-sagis.opendata.arcgis.com/>; "Tybee Island 2021-2026 Comprehensive Plan Update" (Coastal Regional Commission of Georgia, 2021); "Census Profile: Tybee Island, GA," Census Reporter, accessed September 16, 2021, <http://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US1378036-tybee-island-ga/>.

³ "City of Tybee Island Carrying Capacity Study" (Savannah, GA: Ecological Planning Group, 2016), <https://www.cityoftybee.org/DocumentCenter/View/709/Carrying-Capacity-Study>.

⁴ "City of Tybee Open Records Request-Bedrooms Occupancy (Short-Term Vacation Rental Registration List)."

The City receives an excise tax on hotels, motels, and STVRs at a rate of 7% of their income. The City received \$3,639,678 in 2019, \$3,293,486 in 2020, and has budgeted \$3,371,000 for 2021.⁵ However, the city is required to distribute a designated percentage of its excise tax revenue to area economic development initiatives, reducing its net excise tax revenue by over 40%.

How does the City distribute the tax it receives from the Hotel/Motel excise tax?

The City is required by law to contribute a percentage of its excise tax revenue to the Hutchison Island Convention Center and the Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce.

	2019	2020	2021
Hutchison Island Convention Ctr	\$606,734	\$515,114	\$481,475
Savannah Chamber/Commerce	\$1,213,105	\$1,029,918	\$962,661

Additionally, the City distributed the following:

	2019	2020	2021
Tybee Post Theater	--	44,753	70,000
Transfer General Fund	1,819,839	1,545,032	1,444,136
Transfer Debt Service	--	158,669	245,400
Transfer for Beach Projects	--	--	167,328

Therefore, the City

Sends	1,819,839	1,589,785	1,514,136
Keeps	1,819,839	1,703,701	1,856,864

The amount the City keeps represents about 15% of all General Fund Revenue and about 6% of Total Revenue.

How much do STVRs contribute to the local economy?

This is unknown. The City does not collect income data from local businesses, including STVRs, retail stores, and restaurants. Nor does it collect data on STVR occupancy and tourist dollars spent. Any economic impact is purely anecdotal. The estimated STVR impact on the economy could be calculated using the annual occupancy and incomes of the last five to ten years of random samples of STVRs, retail businesses, and restaurants.

How much water is consumed by STVRs?

This is unknown. The City’s software is not configured to identify water usage by address. The City has not designated specific addresses as STVRs in water usage and billing. However, the 2016 Carrying Capacity Study provides estimated usage. It estimated the per person water usage as 117 gallons per day and the 2016 average monthly STVR occupancy per day as 3,378.⁶ Using these numbers, in 2016, STVR renters accounted for an estimated 395,226 gallons per day. In 2016, resident population was approximately 3,082 and used about 360,594 gallons per day. Currently, the City is permitted to draw a maximum of 916,000

⁵ “2022 Annual Budget” (City of Tybee Island, June 24, 2021), <https://www.cityoftybee.org/DocumentCenter/View/2723/2022-Budget---Final>.

⁶ “Carrying Capacity Study.”

gallons of water per day from the Floridan Aquifer⁷ which can support a maximum overnight population (renters and residents) of 7,829 per day. The Carrying Capacity Study estimated the average daily overnight occupancy to be 7,223. In 2016, the City was close to exceeding its maximum draw. In 2025, the maximum draw will decrease to 516,000 gallons per day, which can support a maximum of 4,041 in overnight population. This means: (1) In 2016, STVR renters accounted for about 39% of the maximum daily draw. Since the 2020 Census indicates an increase from 59.6% to 62% of vacant housing, which includes seasonal, recreational, and occasional use housing (STVR) and unoccupied housing for sale or rent, it is a safe assumption that overnight occupancy has also increased due to STVR renters.⁸ In fact, as discussed above, maximum occupancy has increased from 6,000 to about 12,000. The resident population has not significantly changed. (2) If water usage continues at the current rate, in the next four years, the City will exceed its maximum daily draw from the Floridan Aquifer. (3) The City must take action now to address an imminent water shortage. Water usage could be calculated by comparing the list of water usage by address with the list of registered STVRs.

How much do STVRs contribute to wastewater treatment?

This is unknown since the city does not collect this data. However, since STVRs account for about 39% of water usage, an assumption is they also account for a similar percentage of wastewater treatment.

How were STVRs allowed in residential areas?

Successive City Councils and Staffs chose not to enforce its zoning ordinance over the last few years and issued STVR certificates for STVRs in areas zoned residential. The reason is unclear and the language of the ordinance is ambiguous.

Can the City eliminate STVRs in residential areas?

Yes, but. Although the current zoning ordinance would appear to be clear, the way the City has implemented it in the past creates some ambiguity. Many people believe the City's current zoning ordinance prohibits STVRs in areas zoned residential. However, in the past, the City has issued STVR certificates for houses in residential zones. Therefore, in order to eliminate STVRs in residential areas the City would need to amend the zoning ordinance to be unmistakably clear that it will not issue STVR certificates for houses in residential zones in the future. If that occurs, according to Georgia legal precedent, the City will be required to allow those who have operated in residential areas to continue operating until the property has new ownership.⁹

⁷ "Carrying Capacity Study."

⁸ "Census Profile."

⁹ "Face v. Brannan," Justia Law, accessed October 6, 2021, <https://law.justia.com/cases/georgia/court-of-appeals/2004/a04a0378-0.html>.

