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Unincorporated Lancaster County vacation rental checklist

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Lancaster County, Virginia | Rules checked November 7, 2026

Outside the towns, Lancaster County allows hosted short-term rentals (the owner's home, owner on site) with staff approval, and requires a Board of Supervisors special exception for unhosted rentals. Every rental registers yearly, carries $500,000 in liability insurance, caps rentals at 240 nights a year, and posts a parking plan inside.

> The rules took effect July 25, 2024. The county attorney said existing unhosted rentals are not automatically grandfathered, so unhosted owners need a special exception.

Licensing steps

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

- [ ] **Know who pays the tax**
  When a platform like Airbnb books the stay, it collects and pays the state sales tax and the local lodging tax for you. If guests pay you directly, register with Virginia Tax for sales tax and with your county or city for the transient occupancy tax.
  Register a business with Virginia Tax: https://www.tax.virginia.gov/registering-new-business
- [ ] **Register with your locality if it has a registry**
  Many counties and cities require short-term rental hosts to register every year. Registration is a simple filing (your name, each address, and the owner's permission if you lease the home), but listing an unregistered rental can cost up to $500 per violation.
- [ ] **Check your zoning**
  Counties and cities keep their power to decide where short-term rentals are allowed and whether you need a zoning or use permit. HOA and condo rules still apply on top. Pick your area for the local rules.

LANCASTER COUNTY, VIRGINIA

- [ ] **Then your town or area**
  Towns set their own zoning and lodging tax, and the county sets them outside town limits. Pick your area.

LANCASTER COUNTY (OUTSIDE TOWN LIMITS)

- [ ] **Apply for approval**
  For a hosted rental, file the hosted application with proof the home is your primary residence, your insurance certificate, and a septic permit or sewer certificate of occupancy. For an unhosted rental, apply for a special exception from the Board of Supervisors.
  Lancaster STR guide and forms: https://lancova.com/page2.asp?pageID=122
- [ ] **Register every year**
  File the registry form and pay $50 (checks to Treasurer, Lancaster County). Registration runs through December 31 and must be renewed by January 1.
- [ ] **Post the house information**
  Post a summary of county rules, a parking plan, the trash schedule, emergency numbers, and house rules in a prominent place inside the rental.
- [ ] **Taxes on each stay**
  Stays under 90 days owe 5.3% sales tax, and stays under 30 days also owe the local transient occupancy tax. Airbnb collects both on its bookings. If guests pay you directly, file sales tax with Virginia Tax. For direct bookings, pay the county's 2% occupancy tax monthly, coordinated with the Commissioner of the Revenue.

Fees

$50 a year

Registry (yearly)	**$50**
STR inspection (only without a certificate of occupancy) From the Building Department, on the hosted application.	**$50**

Inspection checklist

- [ ] **Smoke detector in every bedroom.** Test at least every three months.
- [ ] **Carbon monoxide detector on each sleeping floor.** Where propane is used.
- [ ] **Fire extinguisher.** Near the kitchen, heat sources, and any fireplace; check every three months.
- [ ] **Certificate of occupancy.** On file with the county, or a $50 inspection.

House rules for guests

Guests: 2 per bedroom overnight
Minor children don't count; bedrooms from the septic permit. No more than 20 people on site.

Parking: 1 space per bedroom

Response time: 60 minutes

Quiet hours: 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.
Until 9 a.m. on Sunday. No open-invitation parties.

Records: Guest names and dates, kept 4 years

Unincorporated Lancaster County asks for drawings with your application.
Make the site sketch, floor plans, and evacuation maps to scale from your measurements at FireEscapePlan.com.

Official sources

Virginia Tax: Guidelines for sales tax on accommodations (P.D. 21-116)-. https://tax.virginia.gov/laws-rules-decisions/rulings-tax-commissioner/21-116

Virginia General Assembly: Short-term rental registries (Va. Code § 15.2-983). https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/15.2-983/

Lancaster County Planning & Land Use: Application for Hosted Short Term Rental. https://lancova.com/documents/STR_app_hosted.pdf

Lancaster County Planning & Land Use: Short Term Rental Annual Registry/Exemption Certificate Form-. https://lancova.com/documents/STR_registry_form.pdf

Lancaster County (code mirror on Zoneomics): Lancaster County Zoning Ordinance, Article 29 (Short Term Rental Regulations)-. https://www.zoneomics.com/code/lancaster-county-unincorporated-VA/chapter_45

Lancaster County Planning & Land Use: A Guide to Short Term Rentals. https://lancova.com/page2.asp?pageID=122

Rappahannock Record: Short-term rental regulations are now in effect in Lancaster (July 31, 2024). https://rrecord.com/?p=81185