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From: Erika Shook
Sent: Monday, February 22, 2021 12:01 PM
To: Council Public Comment
Subject: FW: Affordable Housing/VR Moratorium

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From: Carolyn McGown <carolyn@islandfields.com>
Sent: Monday, February 22, 2021 11:54 AM
To: Jamie Stephens <jamies@sanjuanco.com>; Christine Minney <christinem@sanjuanco.com>; Cindy Wolf <cindyw@sanjuanco.com>; Erika Shook <erikas@sanjuanco.com>
Cc: Lynda Guernsey <LyndaG@sanjuanco.com>
Subject: Affordable Housing/VR Moratorium

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Dear Council Members,

I write as a former (enthusiastic) VR owner/operator and as a current (enthusiastic) LTR owner/landlord.

A young family in need of affordable housing stands on the rim of a canyon and across the chasm on the other side is a house with a landlord. Between them is a deep and wide gap that not only seems unbridgeable, but appears to be widening. As we look down into the canyon, there is dirt flying as bulldozers widen the gap. The bulldozers have names - "lack of living wages", "rising cost of living", "migration due to climate change", "gentrification", "concentration of wealth", "rising home prices", "high livability index" and more. When we stand in solidarity with the family, we are discouraged and it's easy to blame the landlord for the gap. The landlord meanwhile feels like they've worked hard to be able to afford an investment property and that what the family can pay in rent won't even cover their mortgage payments let alone utilities, wear and tear on the house and some profit. They're also trying not to let their own house and personal finances fall into the widening gap as they try to save for retirement and college expenses if they have children themselves. Meanwhile more families and people are lining up alongside the young family looking at the house and they're starting to get very frustrated, if not angry, with the landlord for not extending a bridge. More so if the landlord is running VR's.

Council members and local working groups are asserting direct (and often sole) causality between the lack of affordable housing and VR's. I feel this is not only discouragingly simplistic and disenfranchising to local VR owners but unsupported by hard data. A more professional and comprehensive strategy will be needed not just to achieve fair and

balanced regulations but to achieve the quality of life Cindy Wolf envisions for our county, much of which sounds good to me too. Just because VR's have developed alongside the rising lack of affordable housing doesn't mean VR's have caused the lack. Low wages are also (along with high housing costs) to blame for the economic and physical suffering of families who are unable to find stable housing. In fact, some experts say that low income is MORE the problem than high housing costs are. (see this research by the Brookings Institute: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2017/12/19/is-the-rent-too-damn-high-or-are-incomes-too-low/>)

Before taking the proposed actions (i.e. reducing the number of existing VR's in Eastsound), the Council should provide more evidence and specific data to support the subjective claims that are the foundation of your position. Please keep in mind that there are local families behind these businesses, who rely on this income to continue to afford living here. We are not nameless, faceless enemies of the people. We are people who live here, have our kids in school here, support our aging parents who also live here and who worked hard and went "all in" to create small businesses that are relevant and add to the business fabric of the SJI as well as provide a service to travelers who are so important to the local economy.

Cindy Wolf states: "The problem, as I see it, is vacation rental owners who view the islands as an investment opportunity rather than as a year-round community." That is typical of the broad, hard to quantify statements we've been hearing that are causing division rather than encouraging collaboration. Any small business owner who needs to make a living from their business starts at least partially from the standpoint of seeing it as an investment opportunity. But Wolf's statement is too easily translated as: property owners who are trying to make a living from vacation rentals are the problem. This statement also revolves around the central logic that VR's are directly to blame for the lack of affordable housing. I believe this is a logical fallacy and that the County needs to do more work to prove their central logic before taking concrete measures against VR's, including the moratorium.

Back to affordable housing; how about creating a central housing and employment agency in our county that can vet potential landlords and tenants with a universal application process, as well as vet and connect employers with potential employees and promote living wages? The housing situation can be fraught for landlords as well as for tenants. Instead of disenfranchising 50% of the equation, how about helping to build the bridge?

How about zoning variances for ADU's? i.e. Remove the barriers for permitting and constructing backyard cottages. This could have a positive impact on the goal of supporting seniors "aging in place". If we want to begin the long, hard work of filling in the chasm, we need to think more specifically and collaboratively and with less monolithic thinking, scapegoating and blame.

Sincerely,
Carolyn McGown