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To: Council Public Comment
Subject: Vacation Rental Moratorium

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Dear Council Members,

I request that the following letter be read aloud by staff at the Council meeting.

I am writing in strong support of extending the current vacation rental permit moratorium for an additional 12 months, so that all concerns and repercussions of a new system may be considered, including public participation in assessing new proposals.

The negative impacts I experience from vacation rentals in my neighborhood include:

1. Additional vehicle traffic.
2. Not knowing who's here, who's coming and going in my otherwise tight knit neighborhood.
3. Loss of privacy and feeling objectified by curious sightseers walking and driving by my property--and occasionally up my driveway.
4. Trespassing on my property. (I once found young people in a storage building.)
5. Loud voices by groups of visitors walking up the road.
6. Trash left on my property by people walking by.

Other direct negative impacts are from tourists in general, (I don't know where they are staying)--to which vacation renters contribute.

1. Overcrowding in the grocery store, in town, and in the state park, where trail destruction is alarming.
2. Excessive vehicle traffic and trash on roads where I walk.
3. Noise and rudeness such as refusing to wear masks during the pandemic.

I am also greatly concerned about vacation renters' contribution to our larger island problems of job instability, insufficient affordable housing, and the environmental destruction and destruction of quiet island community life that are caused by uncontrolled growth and development.

There is no question that the current growth trajectory of the county is not sustainable.

From an environmental perspective, humans have far exceeded the natural carrying capacity of the islands. Already, we human islanders depend heavily on mainland resources—food, power, fuel, medicine, medical services, financial services, construction materials, clothing, ferries, garbage disposal, most things we buy at island stores and other businesses, everything we individually order online or travel to the mainland to buy.

Even if we did without everything but food and water, our human population here would not be locally sustainable. We couldn't grow or harvest enough locally to feed all the human residents without destroying all that is left of the natural ecosystems that support life.

When considering the problem of jobs and affordable housing, what occurs to me is that no matter what measure of "carrying capacity" we use--fresh water, food and energy production, amount of land, desirability of the level of development density vs. open space, traffic, crowding, parking spaces; housing, access by ferry, capacity of wastewater management and stormwater management, environmental destruction, tolerance of property owners for higher taxes...there is a basic problem being created by the use of all our limited resources by the steady increase in the percentage of retirees, part-time residents, people working from home for off-island employers or in their own online businesses, and visitors/tourists, none of whom are available to do the paid, year-round, especially full-time, jobs that support the community. I'll call these people "unemployable" for simplicity.

Every time there is an available year-round, part or full time job--say a teacher at the school, a banker, someone to work in county government, health care, the library, OPALCO, or many other jobs, there is a decreasing pool of available qualified applicants in the county. So, someone from outside the county is hired. That person can't find affordable housing, because all the land and county resources that might otherwise be available to build affordable housing or convert current housing stock into affordable housing are being used by the unemployable people living, moving, and visiting here, and the high cost of living makes it difficult or impossible for island employers to pay the new worker enough to live here, and stay in business. Market forces caused by scarcity of properties to buy and rent increases the housing price on both rentals and sales. The more unemployable people are here, the worse this dynamic gets.

The vacation rental industry contributes substantially to this problem, particularly when mainlanders, part time island residents, or islanders with multiple vacation rental properties effectively take our limited island resources for their own profit.

Unless we institute real limits to the influx of "unemployable" people to the county, and assist those whose jobs depend on growing this unsustainable population in transitioning to jobs that instead contribute to regenerating and sustaining our beautiful and necessary natural ecosystems, our cohesive human community, and our rural way of life, we will even more quickly wind up with islands that are uninhabitable by any but wealthy humans. Many current islanders will be pushed out, unable to afford to live here. Businesses will have to rely on off-island workers, unless they are profitable enough to build "company towns" to house their workers. Remaining wild areas will be even more overcrowded and damaged by humans and their technological inventions. Remaining forests, already unable to self-regenerate due to overpopulation of deer resulting from removal of natural predators intolerable to human neighbors, and stressed by climate change, will die. Marine life will be even more destroyed than it already is.

Clearly, we must shift more of the existing housing and developable properties from expensive "unemployable" to affordable "employable" residents. We must incentivize preservation and protection of wild ecosystems on private and public property. We must shift to a stable economy that doesn't depend on environmental or community destruction.

Limiting vacation rental permits is a relatively simple intervention that can have a substantial impact on a huge problem with countless tentacles. A six month moratorium looks inadequate to allow the County Council to arrive at the best way to create appropriate limits to vacation rental permits, in the complex context of all the associated issues. It should be extended for at least another year to allow for creative solutions that address

the entire context of growth, including economic transition for those dependent on this currently unsustainable industry.

With the information I currently have, I would vote to include the following components of a new vacation rental permit system:

1. All current permits are withdrawn (no grandfathering,) a limit is set per island and neighborhood, and a lottery system be implemented for applications when their number exceeds the limit.
2. Approval of permits requires approval by any relevant HOA, Water Users Association, and Sewer Utility.
3. Only full time island residents be eligible for VR permits.
4. Those residents may rent room(s) in their house, or an additional dwelling unit, while they are present and living on the property, to the extent that total occupancy does not exceed the septic permit, conservation rates of water consumption, or available on site (not street) parking. Additional impervious surface area that exceeds the total limit for the property as zoned may not be added to create ADUs or parking.
5. A recreational vehicle not attached to the property's septic or sewage system may not be used as a VR, unless it replaces an unoccupied bedroom that is included in the septic limit, and waste is handled by that septic system. (No dumping in a state or county park.)
6. A permit is granted only to an individual resident owner of and for a specific property, not to the property itself, and automatically expires annually and/or when the property is sold or otherwise transferred. (No permit "runs with the property.")
7. No corporation, business, or trust may hold a VR permit.
8. No owner may hold a VR permit for more than one property.
9. A new system should include job transition assistance for islanders who are dependent on jobs that would be lost with the implementation of the new system.

Thank you for reading and considering my views.

With appreciation,
Alexandra Gayek
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