

Adam Zack

From: Ingrid Gabriel
Sent: Wednesday, July 14, 2021 1:35 PM
To: Vacation Rental Comments
Subject: FW: TIME-SENSITIVE for July 12th -- Vacation rental issue

From: Maryse Sagewynd <maryse@upperleftcoast.com>
Sent: Sunday, July 11, 2021 5:09 PM
To: San Juan County Council <councilvm@sanjuanco.com>
Subject: TIME-SENSITIVE for July 12th -- Vacation rental issue

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Greetings. This comment is for inclusion in your immediate review as the Council considers the issue of housing and vacation rentals, which might also include 2nd/3rd homes.

Nature, Environment, Climate. First and foremost, these islands in particular are finite in their resources. These islands are not Disneyland or resorts. Our natural climate, along with the disturbing changes to Earth's climate, are already affecting long-term viability of human occupation here. We will NOT be able to continue on the trajectory of build/profit/increase/more, more, more, as has been done in the past many decades. These islands are home to hard-working human residents and are living, natural systems dependent on a certain balance of moisture, sun, water, tree and vegetative cover, wild creatures, ocean currents (air and water). Nature is able to accommodate human encroachment for a while, but when that becomes imbalanced, as it is getting now, things will change fairly quickly to the detriment of the natural environment, its native animals, and those who live here year-round. We see visitors interfere with seals and other sea creatures, and often they don't heed warnings about this.

Driving up house and land prices. Some residents are having to live in places not rated for human occupancy -- barns, sheds, rec trailers, boats, neighbor's outbuildings, for part of all of the year -- because regular housing has been converted to short-term vacation rentals or because regular house-building is cast aside for expensive abodes. If these residents need to rent out their own houses so that they can afford to live here, that's a necessity for them, although it's a sorry state of affairs. Rather, it's the focus of profiteers on short-term rentals, 2nd/3rd homes etc., causing prices to skyrocket so that it is now far too expensive to either find and afford a reasonably priced residence (to rent or own, or even to build on vacant land). This stultifies movement -- either potential new community members from elsewhere, or those who want to relocate within the island itself. This means that those who planned on living here through retirement and to end of life could be stuck in place unless they can move to the mainland. This means that teachers, firefighters, medical personnel and other public workers can't afford housing. This means that public services and storekeepers are severely

hampered. This affects the community first of course, but it eventually impacts the vacationers themselves.

What is the long-term goal? Do we want thriving communities -- which are dependent on cooperation with each other, and knowing our neighbors? This is, in fact, crucial to human long-term survival, especially on an island subject to natural disasters. Or do we want the old system of exploitation, a caste system of the wealthy owning nearly all of the land, the shoreline, the buildings, so that only they and their invitees can enjoy what used to be available to the many? Are only those with money entitled to enjoy the beauty and richness of these places? Shall we head quickly to a situation of having mostly wealthy houses which are frequently vacant, tended by the "lower-income," the servant class, who live in what's left over?

Are these islands, with their precious, fragile environments surrounded by sea waters, to be appreciated and respected for their natural offerings and limitations, for the benefit of the common good -- which includes residents, the natural world, and a reasonable amount of visitation? Or are they, like so many other beautiful places around the world, to be exploited and gentrified for the financial gain of so many who don't live here in community, who don't contribute to the common good of small communities, who don't care about routine issues unless it directly affects them/their portfolios?

Plans are being made to "improve" (for the benefit of outsiders) the quirky small-town characteristics that make island life interesting, endearing and special.

Who gets to vote on this? Residents? A handful of people holding political office? Those in bureaucratic positions? Those wielding power and money behind the scenes, whether full-time residents or absentee investors?

Water. Water availability is limited and finite. It cannot be expanded based on desire. Here on Orcas, fresh water from ESWD has become very costly, much more so with the high influx of non-residents and part-time visitors. This issue alone, the viable availability of fresh water, is a real limiting factor on any human expansion.

Peace disrupted. For those who do not view these islands as something to make money from, but rather as a peaceful place to live, this calm peace is threatened year-round now. Some people need this peace for their mental health, for a long-deserved rest from decades of hard work, for respite from the fast-paced frenzy of traffic and attitudes on the mainland -- and yet this frenzy is following us here, in our traffic, in the building of vacation places, in the gobbling-up of resources. It is becoming so onerous that some residents feel compelled to give up all that they worked so hard for.

Threat to ferry access and mobility. For those who live here in their retirement -- for some of us, a goal worked long and hard for -- the influx of people coming here via our beleaguered public ferry transportation system is a real threat. It has become very difficult to get ferry reservations during summer just to get on/off the islands for medical appointments, supply-gathering, and for our own get-aways. It is actually now very limiting, even bordering on dangerous, for residents to be so hampered in our ability to come and go.

Roads. Taxpayers pay for road upkeep; the millions of visitors don't. Roads frequented by vacationers are routinely fixed up by the county *for* visitors; residential side streets are often ignored for years unless someone requests help with them. Vacationers wander onto my private, one-lane dirt/gravel road routinely, lost or looking for some secret passage to the shore. They don't get out and hand-grade the potholes they create, nor fix the ditching, nor scrape off the mud and snow in winter, nor move wind-thrown branches. I have thrown out my back doing this myself. Vacationers also trespass on private areas, tromping through sensitive woods by foot, bicycle, even motorized vehicles, and will tear down signs.

Services affected. Stores here mostly cater to vacationers, not residents. The one grocery in Eastsound has made improvements geared toward them – including a drinking establishment inside. There is only one drugstore on Orcas; most of it is not focused on pharmaceutical goods. There is no shoe/clothing store, except for clothing geared for outdoor recreation. Most of the other shops are not providing what actual residents need. This is a problem for those with disabilities and the elderly who have mobility problems – they cannot always go off island just to get supplies.

Medical; Affordable Help. On Orcas, we are down to one medical facility, which currently has only two doctors, one of which is part-time, and they are seriously overbooked and overwhelmed. If then these many vacationers need medical attention, this takes some of this precious resource away from residents. Further, affordable help for regular folk, the elderly or disabled is becoming non-existent, as those who would provide this support are either unable to afford to live here/find anywhere to live, or charge very high prices because they can get those from wealthy visitors.

Please carefully think about the actual needs of islanders and the limits of the islands themselves. Please put aside for awhile the very short-sighted issue of monetary gain desired by those who wish for profit from their investments in non-residential housing here, and for those who feel that tourists are the best, quickest, easiest, most lucrative ways to make money here. Why are we not focused on more long-term, sustainable sources of income and ways that actually help one another? Absentees and vacationers are not going to step up to help communities in their times of need. These things must be balanced for the common good. Keeping going toward ever more expansion and building cannot work on these islands; ultimately the islands will become a desert.

Sincerely,

Maryse Sagewynd

Eastsound, Orcas Island