

March 15, 2022

San Juan County Council
C/O Department of Community Development
P.O. Box 947
Friday Harbor, WA 98250
Email: VRComments@sanjuanco.com

S.J.C. DEPARTMENT OF

MAR 23 2022

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Dear County Council Members,

I am writing in support of the recommendations, made by the Planning Commission and presented to the Council, to cap vacation rentals at 650 permits with 229 for San Juan Island. That figure roughly represents the number of active and compliant permits currently issued on San Juan Island.

I feel the Commission was correct to base the recommended cap on active and compliant permits as this number reflects the current impact to the islands and to our neighborhoods. If, as the DCD Director asserts, the caps were based on all granted permits and the in-actives and non-compliant were to become active at some future point the impact, obviously, would be much greater.

And should the cap for San Juan Island be set at 500 as Mr. Stephens supports, please consider the current density areas on San Juan that would be disparately affected (see page 3 of Adam Zach's memo of 7-8-2020 entitled Countywide Vacation Rental Permit Density). Although one could argue that San Juan Island can absorb 500 vacation rentals, that would be erroneous. Currently, Roche Harbor, Snug Harbor, Town of Friday Harbor and, my neighborhood, University Heights, shoulder the vast majority of vacation rentals. Of the 55 properties in my community with water rights, 16 or 29% hold vacation rental permits and do actively rent.

Such a large percentage of vacationers where the owner is absent, leads to a myriad of problems. Neighborhood safety is at issue with unattended fires; reckless driving with little regard for children and people walking dogs; noise; public intoxication. As such, the residents are put in a position of safeguarding, to the extent possible, our income-producing neighbors' properties in addition to our own. A neighborhood with so much VR density loses its sense of community, including the involvement of owners in community-minded projects. Further, burden is placed on our community water source. We have tracked and compared full time residential usage versus daily and weekly transient rental usage, on average, and it bears this out.

If additional permits are allowed, it would infringe on hotel revenue, resulting in a loss in lodging tax and could result in business closures. Restaurants and our grocery stores benefit greatly from hotel occupants and less from vacation rental occupants who often purchase groceries on the mainland and cook-in.

I sincerely hope and ask Council members to vote to accept the recommended caps as presented by the Planning Commission. Tourism is wonderful for our County but a balance needs to be struck that will allow residents to enjoy a quality life, workers who help support the tourist industry to have a stable place to live and tourists that are provided a good experience.

Thank you for your consideration,

John Hagey
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