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Sent: Thursday, May 12, 2022 12:15 PM
To: Vacation Rental Comments
Subject: VR owner comments

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Councilors,

I am writing to tell you about my experiences as a long time vacation rental owner:

My wife and I moved to the islands in November of 1990, just in time for 11 inches of rain and then a "100 year" storm and a 3 week power outage. We dealt with the various challenges and figured that this was just life on Orcas Island! I have worked as a carpenter, contractor and real estate broker during the following decades and built 3 houses for ourselves during that time. Kate has worked as a kayak guide, art instructor, jam maker, gardener and realtor. I give you this background so you understand that we have been renters, we have been home owners and now we are vacation rental owners. During this time as our lives have evolved and changed, we have seen the island economy also evolve and change.

When I came here I worked for \$11 an hour as a skilled carpenter and we paid \$850/mth rent for a modest house. After a number of years we managed to save enough to purchase a wooded 1/2 acre lot in the Highlands. Islanders bank provided a construction loan and we camped in a school bus during the summer while I built our home. We lived in 5 different friends' homes, house-sitting and sharing during the rest of the year while I finished the house. I am telling you our history so you understand that we know how challenging being a renter on Orcas has always been; and yet people manage and even thrive through hard work, frugality and persistence.

We are both getting old enough that we are not able to work at physically demanding jobs full time anymore and we began renting our 500 sf guest house and a small home near Rosario purchased 20 years ago as vacation rentals in the early years of Airbnb. VRBO was the major rental platform at that time but was a very expensive advertising platform with a lousy website. Airbnb on the other hand was affordable, adaptable, friendly and did a great job. I have nothing but respect for the business they have conceived and developed. Seeing a market need and filling that need is the essence of creative entrepreneurship and is the real engine of the economy, here and everywhere.

During all these years, we have had ZERO complaints from neighbors and in fact our neighbor in Rosario has told me many times how happy he is with how nice the house looks since it has been a vacation rental. Full time tenants vary greatly in how many cars, boats, and other equipment is there; as well as how they tend the yard and how noisy they and their dogs can be. As a vacation rental the house is kept in immaculate shape and we don't allow pets at all. Maybe we are just lucky with great tenants, but because Airbnb has a review function for GUESTS as well as hosts, they are on their best behavior. The difference between Airbnb and all the other platforms is dramatically different because of guests being held publicly accountable for their behavior.

Our neighbor in Deer Harbor has a vacation rental because they only live here part time. We have never had any problems with their guests. In fact, the long term renters in the house prior to this owner's purchase of the property were frequently a problem. One of them physically threatened me for pruning my apple trees! One of them half-built a dangerous wire fence and then abandoned the property. Another one was growing weed in the basement, etc. I'm going

on about this so that you know full time renters are, in my experience, far more destructive of property and far more likely to have conflicts with neighbors. There are undoubtedly a few bad apples among the Airbnb guests, but because there is a way for hosts to call them out on it in a public forum, they get flagged as bad guests and no one will rent to them. VRBO and other vacation rental platforms do not have this asset available to hosts.

As self-employed, middle class, working people we do not have a huge retirement fund to live on in our old age. We have the real estate that have managed to purchase. Making a living with that real estate is ESSENTIAL to our 'working-retirement'. Renting those two little houses full time would cut our income by at least half.

We have 2 VR permits. Those spaces accommodate a maximum of 3 in our guest house and 6 in the Rosario house, although it's usually just one or two couples.

Having lived here and seen how the deliberate efforts to create a more year round economy have succeeded (partially due to outside factors) and the result that there are restaurants that are now open all year round rather than just the A-1! And all the other business opportunities that exist because of that year round activity, I think the real problem is economic growing pains across the board. Any place with the population increase and thus pressure on living space that we have seen is going to go through the same situation. And in fact, when you look at the news from all over the country, this is exactly what you see. In my lifetime the population of the country had DOUBLED. And yet the amount of buildable land has been dramatically reduced via zoning restrictions (often for very good ecological reasons) during the same time. What do you expect to happen with less land and more people? Prices are going to go up and the improvident and impoverished are going to find themselves priced out of the available space.

And yet, if we do not limit tourism somehow, eventually there will be so many strangers on our streets and trails that we might as well be in the city. Nobody wants this, not even the tourists.

BUT to futilely attempt to limit tourism by illegally limiting one type of vacation rental while ignoring all the others is only going to lead to expensive litigation and revisiting this conundrum over and over in the years ahead.

I support a cap on vacation rental permits that is keyed to the full time population to allow for proportional increases. I don't know what ratio is appropriate but why not pick something, give it a try, and adjust if the results are not what was intended? HOWEVER, any limitations on vacation rentals MUST APPLY TO ALL types of short term rental. Hotels, motels, campgrounds and parks must be included in any limitations on vacation rentals. If you do not, I have no doubt that very expensive litigation will ensue. Surely you have consulted with experienced legal counsel about this aspect of caps? Passing legislation that is doomed to be struck down by the courts is the height of irresponsibility.

I urge you to consider wisely and well, as elected officials you know that the citizens of San Juan County are watching closely and we have long memories.

Sincerely,

Ken & Kate Wood