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From: Jan Scilipoti <jan@janscilipoti.com>
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To: Vacation Rental Comments
Subject: Scilipoti VR comments
Attachments: Scilipoti letter to Council 5-13-22.pdf

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Jan Scilipoti
214 Military Road
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May 13, 2022

San Juan County Council Members

RE: Vacation Rental (VR) Moratorium & Caps

Dear County Council Members,

The VR Moratorium has been a long and difficult discussion for all of us. Thank you for persevering. Having been part of it from the beginning, the following are my personal opinions.

San Juan County is both a place where people live and also a vacation destination. In order to satisfy both residents and tourists, I agree that caps on VR permits will help to maintain the islands that we all cherish. However, I think that each year there should be a reasonable number of new permits available. Here is why:

1- We have a growing gap between wages and the cost of living. The middle class are the residents who need every opportunity they can get to support themselves. Wealthier people do not need to rent their homes (hence the 38-40% 'vacant' homes).

2-Affordable housing is a huge need here, but if homeowners are unable to obtain a VR permit, they will not necessarily turn their homes in long term affordable rentals. In fact, the cost of the homes (including taxes and upkeep), the real issues with being a landlord, and the desire to use the homes themselves throughout the year will stop most owners from renting their homes long term. The most likely result of a tight cap will be an increase in the number of 'vacant' homes.

3- Many VR owners inherited homes, although they currently live full time in other locations. They intend to move to SJC eventually, but want to maintain the home in the meantime. Renting it as a VR allows them to use the home themselves and have income for homeownership expenses. These owners should have access to a VR permit.

4- The petition initiated in 2019 against VRs as well as the public meetings conducted by the VRWG made no effort to include the opinions of VR owners, their guests, or the many people that benefit from tourism (local businesses, LTAC recipients, employees of related trades such as housekeeping and construction).

Furthermore, the regulations addressing neighborhood concerns had just been enacted in 2018, and the positive effects could not possibly be felt a year later. Many residents are still not aware, in 2022, of what the actual regulations are and how they serve our communities.

5- Enforcement of the existing strict 2018 regulations MUST be in place before tight caps - or any caps - are enacted.

6- Not all tourists are VR guests. There are also hotel and resort tourists, boaters, campers, and friends and family of residents. All are tourists, and all use the ferry system, our natural areas, our shops and restaurants, and island resources. It is not equitable to arbitrarily restrict VR tourists over all other tourists.

Regarding Caps:

I personally do not agree that a flat cap is the best solution, because it will not address the specific issues that are occurring in specific areas on Orcas Island (namely, Eastsound and Deer Harbor, where the anti-VR rhetoric began).

Since SJC does not limit the number construction permits (except that they conform to our land use policies), VR permits should be allowed to increase as dwelling units increase. A cap based on a percentage of actual dwelling units seems more equitable than a flat cap.

I do not recommend a lottery system to distribute available permits. A First-Come, First Served method of distribution would allow homeowners to have some idea of when they might secure a permit, and make decisions accordingly. This reduces the 'pain' of waiting for a randomly-distributed permit.

In summary

I urge you to lift the Moratorium, enforce the regulations that already exist, and gather more information before further restricting VR permits.

I ask that if Council must set Caps, vote for Option C, which allows for moderate increase of VR permits.

I appreciate your consideration.

Jan Scilipoti, Lopez