

## Sophia Cassam

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**From:** Meg and Bob Connor <megbobconnor@outlook.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, May 15, 2022 6:14 PM  
**To:** Vacation Rental Comments  
**Subject:** In support of Vacation Rentals in San Juan County

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San Juan County Council

May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022

This letter is to express SUPPORT of vacation rentals in San Juan County, and to enumerate the vast positive ADVANTAGES to San Juan County of vacation rentals.

I am a 57-year Washington resident, my husband a life-long resident of Washington. We both are 47+ year full-time residents of San Juan County, and 30+ year members of the short-term rental community in San Juan County. We have been sharing our guest house when our family is not using it, and welcoming guests since 1990. San Juan County is a tourist-based economy, and has been welcoming visitors here since at least 1935, when the Norton Inn in Deer Harbor first opened.

Opening up our home to visitors allows us to earn the money we need to keep up with San Juan County's drastically rising cost of living. We have had several successful businesses, and environmental projects over our 47 years living on Orcas Island. At this stage of our lives, managing our short-term rentals is the major source of our income. All excessive restrictions on vacation rentals, will result in fewer visits to the region and less economic activity for the local business communities: not just owners of vacation rental houses, but virtually all businesses in San Juan County. On Orcas Island, this includes not only all lodgings, but also: all of our restaurants, gift shops, real estate agencies, advertising sources, cafes, Olga Artworks, pottery shops, flower shops, the wedding industry, car rentals, bike rentals, kayak companies, campgrounds, airports, marinas, Port of Orcas, Orcas Center, movie theaters, whale watching services, fishing boats, etc. etc. ETC. . And all of their employees too. The truth of this was clearly seen in the devastating economic recession during the pandemic, especially the early months with total shut down of "non-essential" travel. Many of our local businesses have not recovered from this negatively impactful loss of their business in 2020.

Tourism and related Accommodations is the second most important "industry" in the County, in 2019, bringing in over \$600,000 in Lodging Tax, plus Sales Tax from retail, restaurants, activities, etc. Trying to eliminate or severely curtail this economic boon to the County seems seriously counter-productive. Why "fix" something that truly has not been a problem? The relatively few opponents to tourism, aren't painting the true San Juan County vacation rental picture. What may possibly be relevant for Nantucket, is probably not relevant here.

We have never had a complaint from our neighbors, and we live within 100-300 feet of our vacation rentals so we can supervise activities, and we do. Our neighbors know how to reach us if they need to, especially since we have been actively renting for decades. All of our guests know our house rules before they come, as well as read them upon arrival. We certainly have not had any problem with any other vacation rentals in our area.

Severely limiting or prohibiting vacation rentals in San Juan County will NOT increase "affordable housing" in the slightest. Most houses that are suitable for vacation rentals are too expensive, thus too valuable, to rent out at any kind of "affordable" monthly rent. Most vacation rental owners do not want to be in the landlord business; they want to be

in the hospitality business welcoming visitors, mostly families with children and other Nature-appreciating visitors to our island. During this pandemic isolation period, visitors from nearby mainland locales, have visited to rejuvenate their mental health, their emotional health, and to feel “normal” again for a few days.

Island visitors are primarily families and affinity groups during the high season, and couples and families during the shoulder and winter seasons. These visitors come to enjoy the peace, beauty, and serenity of our islands, not to “party”. More and more multi-generation family visitor groups want to come to the Islands but are only able to come if large occupancy homes are available.

If the Council continues to place more importance on the loud minority clamoring against already highly regulated vacation rentals, and votes to impose Caps regardless of how many citizens of San Juan County have spoken out against them, then please choose Option C which still allows for at least a moderate increase in vacation rentals. Seems a fair compromise to us.

Thank you,  
Meg and Bob  
Connor  
residents for over 47 years, vacation rental owners for 30 years.

Deer Harbor

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