

Sophia Cassam

From: Judith Scott <judithscott863@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, May 15, 2022 3:08 PM
To: Vacation Rental Comments
Subject: Public Comment for May 17, 2022 Hearing re Proposed Caps on Short-term Vacation Rental Permits

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Council Member Christine Minney
Council Member Jamie Stephens
Council Member Cindy Wolf

Dated May 15, 2022

Dear Members of the San Juan County Council:

I am a full-time resident of Olga on Orcas Island. I am writing to urge you to act decisively on May 17 to enact meaningful caps on the granting of future short-term vacation rental permits. The caps should be set at the number of active and compliant STVR permits per island as of July 31, 2021. That is the level at which residents have already reported the adverse impact of active STVRs on the nature and quality of life in their neighborhoods and communities.

One of the important responsibilities of the SJC Council is to ensure that our fragile island communities are protected against overdevelopment. Council regulations should proceed carefully in a way that does not inflict irreversible damage on our neighborhoods. In the future you can always decide to loosen the caps on STVR permits should circumstances improve. However, due to the nature of the current short-term vacation rental permit system in San Juan County, you cannot reverse the damage of a permit that was ill advised.

In our county, STVR permits run with the property, not with the owner. They are not term limited. So once the county grants a STVR permit, the affected community has no recourse to revisit the wisdom of that decision absent outright violations of the code that must be pursued and enforced by an understaffed county team and by a sheriff's department that must deal with other priorities. Further, the inherent nature of even a compliant STVR involves a high turn-over of guests with the attendant adverse impact that can have on its surroundings.

Petitions, public comments and pleas from island voters over the past 3-4 years, have made it clear to the Council that residents are deeply concerned about the growth of STVRs. Some communities in the nation have adopted an outright ban on STVR rentals; you are being asked to adopt a much more moderate approach by imposing caps on the grant of future permits. But to be effective, these caps need to be set at the number of "active and compliant permits" per island as of July 31, 2021.

Over the past few years, we've learned a lot about what it takes to preserve a strong vibrant island community, and why we should place strict caps on the growth of short-term vacation rentals. Here's some of the important lessons:

1. Functioning neighborhoods are critical to our collective well-being and should be encouraged, not undermined by more STRVs;

2. Our natural resources are facing the adverse impact of climate change; we need to be extra careful in safeguarding them rather than jeopardizing them by over-tourism and more STRVs;
3. Our structural infrastructure, including our roads, bridges and ferries, are stressed to the max; this past year of flooding damage and ferry cancellations reflect a new reality which cannot accommodate more STRVs; and
4. The lack of long-term rental housing has reached a crisis level for working people on our islands; more STRVs will only exacerbate the problem by offering financial incentives to owners to rent short-term rather than long-term.

So please act now to enact caps on the granting of short-term vacation rentals at the number of "active and compliant" STRV permits per each island as of July 31, 2021.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Judy Scott
Olga, WA

Sent from my iPhone