

Sophia Cassam

From: Kerry Hartjen <creativefool2@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, May 16, 2022 6:32 PM
To: Vacation Rental Comments
Cc: San Juan County Council
Subject: Short Term Vacation Rentals

[You don't often get email from creativefool2@yahoo.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>.]

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Councilmembers,

My wife and I have lived on San Juan Island year-round since June of 2007. We were drawn here by a number of things – the sense of community, the peace and quiet, and the chance to live a healthier, happier and slower lifestyle. We visited many times, in every season, for 6 years before making the decision to spend our retirement years living here. We were finally able to find a modest fixer-upper to purchase in 2011 and we feel blessed to have been able to do that. We love this way of life and we have never regretted our decision to make this place our home.

Over the past several years we have watched with dismay as this island community is being eaten away, little by little, by an ever-increasing trend towards selling away the island way of life in order to draw more and more tourists here. I understand that we are, for the most part, a tourism-based economy. But there must be a balance between the need for tourist dollars and the need for a sustainable way of life for locals.

We do not have enough housing for the people who live here. We don't have housing at all, in many cases, for the workers who keep our businesses alive, or even for families. The very limited housing which is available is often well out of the reach of ordinary people. The rents being charged are often outrageous, and they keep going up and up all the time. And yet we are seeing more and more homes being turned into short-term vacation rentals for visitors who are not invested here and who have no interest in, or regard for, the long-term impact they make on our island community.

Every spring and summer our narrow roads are made more dangerous and congested by the ever-growing numbers of cars, bikes, pedestrians and rental vehicles on the road. The numbers keep growing, but nothing is being done (and perhaps nothing can be done) to widen the roads to make them safer. Our supermarkets are frequently short of goods, especially in the summer months. And the impact on the local wildlife and the balance of nature here is under constant threat.

I am not anti-tourist. I am pro-island. I myself am an artist and I sell my goods primarily to tourists. But if we want to keep the tourist economy healthy in the long run, then we first have to ensure that the infrastructure for islanders is as strong, healthy and balanced as it can possibly be. That means making enough homes for locals and seasonal workers a priority. It means making the roads safer and more navigable. It means making the day-to-day needs of islanders our number one concern. It means maintaining and enhancing the quality of life for locals so that we can provide a quality, memorable and meaningful experience for visitors.

I'm sure that those with a vested interest in making money from vacation rentals are going to band together and lobby for even fewer restrictions, not more. But we have enough vacation rentals. We need more housing for residents. We need more locally-owned businesses and lower rents for those businesses, and more housing for their employees, so that we can have fewer empty commercial spaces downtown.

Only by providing decent, affordable, livable housing for locals and seasonal workers can the tourist economy be maintained. We need to set a reasonable limit on the number of vacation rental units now, or we will almost certainly regret not having done so later.

Thank you,

Kerry A. Hartjen
968 Terrace Drive
Friday Harbor, WA 98250