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From: Jean Perry <vortexcafe@hotmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 17, 2022 12:18 AM
To: Vacation Rental Comments
Subject: Thoughts on vacation rentals from a business owner on Lopez

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Hello,

I would like to express my strongly held opinion about vacation rental permits as the owner of a restaurant on Lopez Island for 26 years.

There are two intimately connected issues that have profoundly affected my business and its ability to grow and thrive. The first is the increasing difficulty of finding affordable housing. The second is the increasing imbalance between residents who are primarily looking for services (for example, those who are retired or second home owners) and those who provide services as well as utilize them (essentially the working class).

The San Juan Islands are naturally a destination for visitors, and business owners expect and often rely upon seasonal business for financial stability, but the seasonal economy also presents many challenges. I had a pizzeria in Seattle for 10 years before moving to Lopez, and there is no comparison between a business with a steady customer base and one whose business ebbs and flows with corresponding changes in the needs for employees and infrastructure. To me, a seasonal economy is a challenge enough with the additional difficulties of finding a viable labor force.

In the last 10 years or so, the problems of seasonality have been exacerbated by the lack of affordable housing. I realize that this is a multifaceted issue, and that as long as I have been here there has always been the need for seasonal workers to rely on marginal housing like tents, yurts, and buses for the summer. But now there are so few of these options, and so few affordable accommodations for year-round workers that the scramble for workers with secure housing has reached a level somewhere between ridiculous and painful.

My business, Vortex Cafe, has gone from being open for 60 hours per week in 2012 to being open only 20 hours per week, all year round, in 2022. The availability of labor, especially of longer-term labor, is the sole reason for this change. It has become very time-consuming to continually explain to visitors (as I feel I must) why there are no restaurants open on Lopez on certain days of the week, even in the summer.

While vacation rentals are not the only cause of this untenable situation, I know from the experiences of my employees that rentals which become unavailable to them in the summer months is a huge problem. The lack of marginal housing--often because people are living year-round in accommodations which are actually only comfortable in the warmer months, meaning they are not available for the summer influx of workers--means that there is constant shuffling and anxiety about housing, resulting in many good workers eventually leaving the islands.

I would like to encourage the county to apply strong limits to vacation rental permits as one of the tools which is available to address this difficult problem.

My business would be far more vibrant, stable, and innovative with a reliable workforce, rather than constantly struggling to get staffing just to get from one day to the next as it does now. I strongly advocate for any actions that can be taken by the county to address the imbalance of wealth in the islands and to help ensure that we have the services available to residents and visitors alike that make the islands attractive and enjoyable.

Sincerely,
Jean Perry
Vortex Cafe

Sent from my iPad