

Adam Zack

From: Jill Twist <jtwist@sjlib.org>
Sent: Saturday, March 10, 2018 1:16 PM
To: Comp Plan Update
Subject: Comment for comp plan after afford. housing meeting

I'm writing with a few comments about the information and suggestions offered at last night's affordable housing meeting. Though you mentioned only 7% of houses on San Juan Island are vacation rentals, and alluded to the fact that this was a minor amount, I think it's important to note two things. First, for comparison, the director of Orcas's affordable housing group was proud to say that Orcas Island has 7% of their housing as affordable units. Second, as you mentioned and as many of us know, not all vacation rentals are identified as such. This means that in all likelihood the percentage of vacation rentals on this island is higher. Though it may only be slightly higher, as you mentioned, 40% of housing on this island is empty for part of the year. This means that there is a hypothetical potential of 40% of the housing to convert to vacation rentals. Though this is an extreme hypothetical, I mention it to underscore the importance of incorporating restrictions and measures in the comprehensive plan as a preventative measure.

In addition to caps on the number of vacation rental units in total or in specific neighborhoods, there are other measures that cities in the US have taken. For instance, San Francisco requires owners to occupy their houses for a certain amount of time in proportion to the amount the owners wish to book the house as vacation rentals. Increased taxes are always an option, but of course, an unpopular one.

Another option would be to propose a tax on the building of new houses over a certain number of square feet. For example, the castle being built at Roche Harbor might incur an additional tax.

Other options were mentioned last night, such as adjusting the 100-foot rule to allow the building of rentable guesthouses on large properties. This is particularly encouraging because it shows respect for the land owners who stay in compliance with county rules by not building additional units (as opposed to second-home owners who disregard rules when they book their home as vacation rentals without the proper permits).

But of course, I think what is perhaps most important and perhaps most often overlooked at these affordable housing discussions is that housing is just one of many factors that do not offer equitable living for low income people on the islands. Other significant factors include wages, jobs that offer health insurance, the continued increase in ferry ticket for locals (when there could easily be a discount for homesteaders) and the ferry reservation system (which allows hotels or tour groups to buy large amounts of tickets during holidays).

Thank you very much for your time in speaking last night and for reading and considering my email.

Kindly,
Jill Twist