

Jan Scilipoti

214 Military Road Lopez Island, WA 98261 360-622-9050

November 18, 2020

San Juan County Planning Commission
Cc: San Juan County Council

Dear SJC Planning Commissioners,

I have lived and worked on Lopez Island for 20 years, and I'm writing regarding the current vacation rental (VR) permit discussion in the county. As a resident wage earner and a VR host, I am not 'for' or 'against' vacation rentals, but instead hope to find a balance where we support vacation rentals as well as the residents of our communities.

In addition to a full-time job doing landscaping on Lopez, I am also a VR host on Orcas. As my cost of living increased and my retirement age approached, I needed another income stream. To my delight, I enjoy being a host. I put out clear messaging to attract guests who are respectful and responsible. Most drive here from Seattle or Portland, and I have numerous reviews thanking me for a peaceful respite where they are able to hike and relax. The guests support local businesses but largely keep to themselves. I manage the property myself, and hire a Orcas couple to do the housekeeping and repairs. I pay them a living wage and they are vital to the rental's success.

Below are comments regarding the Agenda for VR Permits for the PC meeting on November 20, 2020:

"Should the number of vacation rentals be capped or limited to prevent over-tourism?"

A memo from Adam Zack dated August 7, 2020 shows there are currently 430 Active, Compliant VR permits. That means as many as 430 people could have their income impacted by the decision to this question. Options A through D are sweeping changes. The SJC VR permit system was just changed in 2018. I don't think we've even seen the results of those changes. Why are we already proposing further restrictions? I would like to see this decision postponed, especially given the fluctuations occurring due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, I would like to bring attention to another option which was given as a recommendation by the Eastsound Planning Review Committee in a letter to Adam Zack dated October 9, 2020. Item #1 suggests two tiers of VRs. The second tier grants permits based on a percentage of the rentals currently permitted in that land use designation. This

is similar to the method used in Savannah, GA, where the number of VR permits is tied to the number of housing units in each designated 'ward' of the city. It is a time-tested method, and the primary goal is to keep the owner-occupant level high in each area of the city. An example in SJC is shown on Map 1 on the Memo from Adam Zack to SJPC dated August 7, 2020. The map shows an area in SW Eastsound with neighborhood VR saturation. Areas like this could be identified as having a designated percentage of homes available for VR permits. Currently, an unlimited number of permits are theoretically available.

Limiting the number of VR permits by percentage of housing units within identified areas would alleviate several of the frequently expressed concerns of VRs: impact on neighboring properties, over-tourism, supply of affordable housing units, and stock of long-term rentals.

As to another frequently expressed concern, noise and parties in VRs: a number of communities in the U.S. are addressing this in specific, proactive ways such as: not allowing single night rentals, requiring guests to be over 25 years old when reserving, asking managers to include specific language in the listing and house rules (SJC implemented this in 2018), and putting a cap on the number of guests in large properties, regardless of the number of bedrooms. In addition, some jurisdictions require a 'noise-aware' system (available for both indoor and outdoor areas) that notifies the property owner/manager when decibels go above a designated level. Property managers on each island could also hire an individual who personally responds to each noise complaint within a given amount of time. These measures are highly successful in reducing gatherings and subsequent noise.

What legal options exist for nullifying all existing vacation rental permits?

This was chilling to read! Even though it is just an exploration, as a host who relies on the income from my VR, I must protest. Nullifying all existing VR permits is far too heavy-handed to consider. The negative impact on islanders' income (both hosts and business owners), reduction of SJC tax income (10.1% of all VR rates, plus the initiation and annual fees that all compliant permits now require), not to mention the disappointment of guests who visit the islands make this an option not to be considered. Whether islanders like it or not, the short term rental option is here to stay, to the dismay of hotel chains world-wide. I request this option be taken off the table.

I would like to respond to one more item on the letter to Adam Zack dated October 8, 2020 by the Eastsound Planning Review Committee. Item number 5 relates to VR owners who own and operate more than one rental. I request that there be a distinction between resident and non-resident owners. What I believe the committee is trying to avoid are investors who buy in our region but are not tied to the community in any meaningful way. I do not think that county residents should be limited in the number of rentals they operate. There are already limited ways to support ourselves on the islands. Please do not take away one of them.

It seems that vacation rentals will continue to spur discussion in the county. As such, I have a request for the Planning Commission. *Would it be possible to create an email list to which VR permit holders can subscribe if they choose, so that we are notified about VR-related issues?* For instance, in the spring when the VR ban was enacted and modified, notifications would have been most welcome, and would probably have increased compliance with the mandate. Most of us felt that we had to be reactive rather than proactive, and disseminating information directly to permit holders would have helped. Sending a notification to permit holders when VR's are on the Agenda for Planning Committee meetings would be another extremely helpful tool.

Thank you for your consideration, I hope to continue to be involved in these discussions.

Sincerely,

Jan Scilipoti

The following island residents have asked that their names be included in support of the vacation rental opinions that I've outlined above.

Meg & Bob Connor, residents since 1974, VR owners since 1990.

Cathy Ferran & Jim Cardinell, 30 year residents, hosts for 4 years.

Kari Ginter Schuh, Orcas resident since 1996, host 2010-2018.

David & Nancy Hodges, San Juan retirees, part-time hosts.

Vicki Leimback & Dan Christopherson, residents since 2014 and 1977, hosts for 5 years.

Trini Leslie, new resident, San Juan host.

Carolyn & Bill McGown, Lopez residents since 2013, hosts for 3 years.

Cynthia Moffitt, Lopez resident since 2007, host for 12 years.

Suzanne Olson

Stella & Mark Padbury, 25 year residents and hosts.

Jodi Spitalli & Daniel Marty, Orcas residents for 7 years, hosts for 5 years.

Janice Williams, Orcas resident since 2009, host since 2013.

Susan Williams-York, San Juan resident since 1976, host since 2015.

Bruce Wilson & Mary Jane Elgin, Orcas residents and part-time hosts.

Kate & Ken Wood, residents for 30 years, hosting as their retirement.