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From: Wendy G. Tillman and R. Roy Finkle <skyriver@verizon.net>
Sent: Friday, February 12, 2021 11:15 AM
To: San Juan County Council
Subject: Moratorium on Short Term Vacation Rentals Must Lead to Meaningful Regulation

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Dear Councilpersons:

We purchased our home in Roche Harbor in August 2010 and were never informed by the realtors that an illegal vacation rental home was in full operations next door to us.

By the time we discovered what was the cause of all the noise, partying, dogs running loose on our property and other inconsiderate conduct by an ever-changing entourage of visitors — an illegal operating short tern vacation rental next-door, a listing agent for the sellers had begun the process of legalizing the unit. We and many of our neighbors spend hours and days opposing the issuance of a STR permit to an owner who had flouted the law and the rules for more than 5 years. Nevertheless, the hearing officer told us and our neighbors that property owners had a “right” to obtain a STR permit on San Juan Island and that the best we could hope for are limits on the operations of the STR. Well, the limits on the permit we obtained for all of our efforts, have been flouted and ignored for the past 6+ years that the STR permit has been in place!

We have filed sheriffs reports in the middle of the night, we have filed complaints to the zoning officers, we have met with the Director of Planning and Development — and all to little avail. My husband who is 76 years old must sleep with ear plugs in order to go to bed when he wishes! This is neither fair nor just that the rights of owners to the privacy and quiet use and enjoyment of their property — for which we pay taxes just like everyone else — is clearly subordinate and subservient to the rights of absentee owners to obtain an income stream off their STR.

We have owned property in many places and never have we found a place that a right to turn a residential home into a hotel in residential zoning is EQUAL to the rights of owners to the quiet peaceful enjoyment of their homes! By making these rights equal, you have opened the door to literally undermining the very residential zoning you have ostensibly created. You have removed the difference between the impacts of a small hotel in Friday Harbor and the impacts of a STR without ever warning the public before purchasing that every single family home in the county may find themselves residing next to a small hotel— as a matter of legal “right”.

This backdoor approach which undermines the very essence of residential zoning is doing more to destroy the quality of life in the San Juan Islands than all of the illegal fishing or hunting or anything else.

Without a real system of regulation — not a 24 hour phone line which goes to a message machine or calls to the Sheriff in the middle of the night — and MEANINGFUL oversight including costly monetary penalties and immediate cancellation of the STR permits after a few violations, the SJI will have the notorious reputation it is quickly gaining to outsiders....a party spot from June-September. A reputation which has been long in the making and which will be hard to change unless immediate action at the zoning level is implemented.

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