

Adam Zack

From: Ingrid Gabriel
Sent: Wednesday, July 14, 2021 1:34 PM
To: Vacation Rental Comments
Subject: FW: testimony re Vacation Rental Moratorium for 12 July 2021 hearing before the County Council

From: joe symons <joesymons@me.com>
Sent: Sunday, July 11, 2021 6:59 PM
To: San Juan County Council <councilvm@sanjuanco.com>
Subject: testimony re Vacation Rental Moratorium for 12 July 2021 hearing before the County Council

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Ingrid: please distribute this to Council and if there is time, please read this into the record. I am unable to attend tomorrow's hearing. Thanks much.

Joe Symons

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the Council regarding the decision as to whether to extend the VR moratorium and/or whether to make changes in the moratorium restrictions.

For the record, I support:

- extending the moratorium for another 6 months;
- modifying the moratorium to include the addition of RR (rural residential) to the land use areas that are protected from additional VR permits during the moratorium;
- crafting fixed maximum caps per island;
- a cap on Orcas that is no larger than the current active, compliant VR permits on the island;
- crafting a methodology that will determine whether any cap has been set too high and, if such a determination is made, that a process for eliminating the excess VR capacity be developed;
- incentivizing home stays;
- a county-managed complaint hotline (separate from the Sheriff's Dept);
- the recommendations articulated by the Orcas Vacation Rental group in the December 2019 letter to Council;
- the creation of a business license for VR permit owners and that such a license be required in order to have a VRP;
 - VR's are a business, and should be taxed and regulated like any other business; the business license should have significant fees and be required to be renewed annually.
- eliminating the legally-questionable determination that any granted VRP "run with the land". VRPs should not be permanently vested.

Of critical importance, and a component that has received far too little attention in the imbroglia associated with this topic, is the Vision Statement of the Comprehensive Plan (CP). DCD's proposed options, expressed in the 7 August 2020 memo from Adam Zach, subject "2036 Comprehensive Plan Update, Section B, Element 2, Land Use and Rural Vacation Rentals", explicitly reference the CP as the vehicle for dealing with the Vacation Rental issue.

The SJC Vision Statement (VS), stated as the foundation of the CP, upon which the entire CP is based, has no references to expanding the tourist or visitor section. Indeed, the clear message in the VS is to support local existing needs, to keep the county small, quiet, rural. The VS speaks of "the isolated nature of the islands". The fact that the VS does not address visitors should not be interpreted that the crafters of the VS were clueless. Silence does not mean permission to do whatever isn't explicitly prohibited or regulated.

A central question before you is whether you wish to honor, or ignore, the SJC Vision Statement. It's been ignored for decades, so you have what I would call an inappropriate precedent. Ignoring a problem, as for example Climate Disruption, does not make the problem go away. It just kicks the can down the road while allowing the problem to go viral.

You were elected to represent all the residents of SJC. Over 3000 people signed a petition asking for a moratorium. 3 of the 4 candidates for the recent Nov 2020 election were unambiguous about their support for a VR moratorium. Thousands of votes were cast to support candidates who stated their positions. Yet a relative handful of individuals, almost all on SJ Island, thoroughly disrupted a long-overdue conversation, eviscerating the intent of the moratorium and demonstrating clear disregard for the issue and the unprecedented size of the concern expressed by the overwhelming majority.

SJC public process, while perhaps typical, is all but worthless in dealing with important topics. There are no press conferences. There is no opportunity for dialog. There is no ongoing process, initiated and supported by the County, to deal with difficult, county wide problems. A 3 minute public testimony opportunity is all but useless in unpacking this issue. Further, testimony only available during working hours disenfranchises the vast majority of working people.

Decisions on the VR topic should not be viewed as a popularity contest: some speak in favor of the moratorium, some speak against it: do you simply count those in favor and those opposed and whoever has the most speakers on the topic "wins"? Or give extra credit to those who speak louder, regardless of the legitimacy of their arguments?

As Council members, you were elected to "do the right thing" for the county as a whole. Overtourism fueled by high tech platforms, and augmented by the pandemic, is rapidly changing the costs and the burdens of those who chose SJC for qualities that are eroding as fast as Greenland ice sheets are melting. Do you wait until things are awful before you act? At that point, what would be the action set you could take?

The VR topic needs metrics that measure the downsides that are created by too many people in a limited space; those metrics do not exist. The upsides are easy: you can see tax revenues and more happier tourist-related local businesses. Or maybe not. Most small tourist businesses can't get employees for the summer. Their happiness level is not high. SJC needs to drill down to really assess the damage that too many people are creating. It's not that tourists or new residents are "bad". What they do is change the game.

It's a bit like taxation without representation. We did not vote for this. We do not want to see the many downsides of the tourist economy maintained, much less increased. Privatizing public rights while socializing the costs has put us in the front row of an evolving global mass extinction event.

Is SJC wise enough to stop the bleeding here?

Reread the Vision Statement and ask yourselves what you should do to honor the intentions of the residents who crafted it and which you accepted as the direction desired by those who voted for you.

Thank you

Joe Symons
Olga WA

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