

Adam Zack

From: Heather Mitchell <heatherkmitchell@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, July 19, 2021 12:47 PM
To: Comp Plan Update
Subject: Vacation rental cap for Lopez Island

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Hello-

I'm writing to request that the Vacation Rental Permit cap for Lopez Island be either kept the same or increased minimally. The proposed increase from 130 to 174, or a 34% increase is simply too much. I would support a 5% increase but prefer a moratorium on increases until we can further evaluate the impacts of vacation rentals.

I have lived on Lopez for 12 years now and have seen and experienced the negative impacts of rapidly increasing tourism. I am a business owner and I am having trouble finding folks to hire to help with the work of my business.

I would like you to take this issue very seriously--it has the potential to push us into a future that is unsustainable.

Here are some things I would like you to consider.

- Vacation rental owners who live off-island are profiting entirely at the expense of our island community. Many VR owners who live on Lopez do not rely on VRs as a primary source of income but rather as a way to make extra money for travel, etc. Lopezians who rent second homes or cabins as airbnbs could choose to provide year-round housing for locals and still make a sizable yearly income.
- Children of aging locals who would like to move here to help caretake their parents cannot find housing. Young families are leaving the island due to lack of affordable housing. Even the new school superintendent must commute from Bellingham!
- In 2020, the San Juan County Board of Commissioners commissioned a study to compare the San Juan Islands to similar communities such as Aspen, Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. The report concluded that in those resort communities, wealthy purchasers of vacation homes changed the character of the communities, raising rents and housing prices which eventually led to a mass exodus of modest income residents. The report also said that the similarities in size, scale, access, environment, and trends make the San Juans look just like Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard did 20 to 30 years ago. <http://www.doebay.net/appeal/socioeconomicgrowth.pdf>

- Lopez Island business do NOT want or need more tourism! Many local shops and restaurants can barely accommodate the business they already have and struggle to find workers. Some businesses have shortened their hours/days and most have help-wanted signs in the window. Last week, two village business closed down for a couple of days because they literally ran out of product!
- Vacation rentals stress our fragile ecosystem, especially our rain-fed aquifers. VR owners are unable to monitor visitor water usage and garbage production, regardless of signs they may leave in rental units. According to surveys, local residents host visitors for an average of 2 weeks per year. Vacation rentals host dozens, sometimes hundreds, of visitors year-round and must wash sheets and towels and clean units after each set of guests.
- Increasing tourism on the island has NOT improved the quality of life for local residents! Locals must now wait in line for over two hours for a Lopez-only ferry. Locals compete with tourists for island resources, including food and basic supplies. Lopez is not becoming more self-sustainable, but rather adapting to a wealthier clientele who demand all the same resources as a big city.

Thank you very much for your time and effort!

Sincerely, Heather Mitchell

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