

Adam Zack

From: Rick Strachan <bakerview247@me.com>
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To: Comp Plan Update
Subject: Caps on Vacation Rentals

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Dear people, I have heard you are going to vote to increase vacation rentals on Lopez Island by 34% and will vote on this issue perhaps as early as next Tuesday, and I have also heard that the "reason" you are taking this position is that you have heard almost exclusively from VR (vacation rental) owners. That's not surprising since the rentier class actually have the leisure time to advance their death march of progress, and the the rest of us who are scraping by in one form or another are too busy trying to make a go of it here to have much time to ask you to please be sensible.

"Legal" VRs should immediately be capped at their current level and the licenses to operate them should be sunset within 10 years. The underground VR universe which is most likely much larger than the legal one is a serious and seriously unpleasant problem. It's not good for neighbors to be ratting on each other but the operators of these clandestine hotels need to be ferreted out, exposed and put out of business. This is a bad problem, but it was self-inflicted by the County government's passivity. You will not be able to control this sector. The Pakistani government could not control Al Queda. Neither the American nor the Russian governments could control the Afghan rulers. Iran can control Hezbollah. The Israeli government cannot control either the Palestinians or the border settlers. You will not be able to control the underground VR intrusion. In any arrangement between a larger power and a smaller "client" entity, the smaller one always controls the relationship.

VR have become a nightmare for me and many others who see an accelerating decline not only of their standard of living but of the islands' built ecosystem of infrastructure and support. This decline of an ecosystem of infrastructure and support has many manifestations ranging from wells going dry earlier in the year to doctors resigning their practices to stores and restaurants closing because they no longer have workers who can afford to live here. This is real, pernicious and persistent and it is a purely human caused problem. We did this to ourselves, deliberately, without thinking about the implications of allowing people to discover they can pay off their mortgages much more quickly if they expel their long-term tenants and instead inveigle leisure seekers or Covid refugees to come on up and take several spaces on the ferry while they're at it. They never thought through what it might mean to expel their tenants who might have been teachers, nurses, firemen, linemen, whatever. They went for the money being dangled by VR aggregators who live far away from here.

There is a key thing to remember about VR and the people who apparently keep insisting to you that they are benign good citizens providing a crucial service in the name of progress, and that is that *they are indifferent to the source of their income*. They don't care where it comes from, they just want it. It could come from Antarctica for all they care. Right now, it just happens to be coming from Lopez.

Abraham Lincoln once said "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power", (or in this case, money). The money dangled by far-away VR aggregators has brought out the worst in the VR owners who reap money for themselves and push all the adverse effects of their regrettable decision off on their neighbors and friends whose wells are going dry and whose kids' teachers are leaving.

People who contact you may offer up a long list of the adverse effects VR has inflicted on us; I will focus on one component, the ferry system.

I think that one of the things that lulls you and probably other people into seriously considering the wishes of real estate agents and their siren song of “progress” is because you keep falling for the concept that the ferries are a “marine highway”. We have all heard this ridiculous phrase many times. It makes things seem so ‘normal” to someone from the mainland. They’re just going out for a drive! The ferries are not a marine highway and to confuse the State ferry system with the terrestrial web of concrete and asphalt on the mainland is just plain ignorant, and harks back to the days of news reels at the movie theatre where some eager sounding “reasonable” man extolled the wonders of prosperity, and his barely controlled amazement that a lumbering scow like the ferries are actually a safe and exciting way to travel was no doubt calibrated to release a tsunami of people fleeing the theatre for the safety of a ferry trip..

Maybe it was so in the '50s. The 1950's. Now, not so much.

On a “real” highway, if a guy gets a heart attack and dies, the rest of the thousands of travelers whizzing by on the freeway keep going with no thought for the tragedy outside. If a guy has a heart attack on the ferry, everything comes to a halt while they figure it out and 250 people on board have to instantly recalibrate their day that had been so carefully planned. There goes that doctor appointment! No whizzing by here, folks! Likewise with stupid people. One person doing something stupid can hold up progress for everyone else. On land, the police will arrive quickly and take him away and no one else is inconvenienced. If someone does something stupid on a ferry, who knows how long we would be at sea on what started as a three hour tour that started two hours late? The idea of the ferries as a “marine highway” is long obsolete and it’s past time for you to remember that these islands live a very attenuated existence, dependent on undersea cables and *a ferry system unencumbered by the thousands of tourists and looky-loos who have given the ferry system a dose of atherosclerosis it is not recovering from*. The ferry system is coding *right now*, and right before your eyes. It was Air BnB and Vacasa that brought this terminal disease to an unsuspecting populace.

Six years ago, people were happy here (“Nearly all men can stand adversity”). We bragged how tough we were. The moat of Rosario Strait, and the quaint method of transit to the islands kept a mostly clean wall between the wanna be’s and the full-time residents who were quite proud they had the ability to withstand the adversity of the occasional outage and accident and especially the glory days when the wind blew so strongly that the ferry couldn’t even dock!

When people asked me why I was going back to live on an island again, I would say “every castle needs a moat”, and it worked, for awhile. But now Air BnB has breached the moat and there is no defense against the hordes who have swarmed over the moat to infest our lives and bring our transportation to a slow motion death march. Anyone can deal with a delay one time. It used to take a resident to be prepared to deal with more than one. But now, we are willingly accepting the sort of service that in the private sector would get a whole lot of people canned, and would restrict traffic to the available spaces and prioritize residents and business way ahead of tourists. This is an interesting case of mass Stockholm syndrome in the island population. We’re all putting up with this crap just so a tiny minority of citizens can continue to pay their mortgage off at accelerated rates. That’s progress!

Now, six years on, you can’t take back what you didn’t do. Vacation rentals smacked you in the head, not just here, but everywhere in the country and the county government has stood by and watched as swarms of people infested the islands and a few people got richer by expelling the workers who make things run, the plumbers, electricians, wait staffs, gardeners, line men, firemen, nurses, teachers, the people who make a democracy a real presence, and in their place, a bunch of experience-hungry day-trippers with no tie to the islands and no skin in this game.

We can’t go on like this. Why do you keep even considering this stupidity? A 34% increase? I don’t think so. That increase will just facilitate a corresponding increase in the underground economy in rentals that won’t go away. Tell the real estate industry, NO! No more tourism! Bring back our people who keep us healthy and safe and our kids educated and tell the Vacasa rentier people that they should go back to long term rentals for these people that keep us going! Stop the mass exodus of working people! Stop the degradation of the aquifers, and the overwhelming loads coming into the transfer station! Stop the 2 hour wait times for the ferries! This place is going to hell quickly and it’s not because of Covid, or global warming or any of that and you’re the only ones who can stop it.

Rick

RICK STRACHAN
P.O. Box 969
64 PORTOBELLO ROAD
LOPEZ ISLAND, WA 98261-0969
360.622.9163 MOBILE
BAKerview247@icloud.com