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From: Geoffrey Heard <geoffheard@icloud.com>
Sent: Saturday, July 17, 2021 9:29 AM
To: San Juan County Council; Jamie Stephens; Christine Minney; Cindy Wolf
Subject: Vacation rentals

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Dear council members,

I urge you not to increase permitting for vacation rentals. One of my fellow Lopez Islanders says it more eloquently than I can:

Dear friends and neighbors,

The County Council has recommended increasing vacation rentals on Lopez Island by 34% and will vote on this issue as early as next Tuesday. Currently, there are 130 vacation rentals on Lopez, over half of which are run by people who don't even live here. If you oppose a 34% increase on vacation rentals (and/or support freezing or lowering the current number and a ban on non-residents running airbnbs), please write the County Commissioners ASAP and let them know! Up until now, they have heard almost exclusively from VR owners.

- Multiple studies have concluded that Airbnbs lead to gentrification. They increase rents and housing prices and drive out lower income communities.*
- 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.

If you want to preserve our island way of life, PLEASE make your voice heard! Otherwise, we will become yet another resort community and our grandchildren may not be able to afford to even visit, let alone live on Lopez Island.

Thank you.

Geoff Heard
Lopez Island