

## Adam Zack

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**From:** Transition Lopez Island <info@transitionlopezisland.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 22, 2021 4:45 PM  
**To:** San Juan County Council; Jamie Stephens; Cindy Wolf; Christine Minney; Vacation Rental Comments  
**Cc:** Ande Finley; Bob Gerfy; Chom Greacen; Clarissa Mish; Henning Sehmsdorf; Kim Foley; Lafferty, Liz; Michael Moore; Ron Metcalf; Ryan Palmateer; Scott Finley  
**Subject:** Vacation Rentals

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Dear County Council and Members of the Planning Commission:

Transition Lopez Island's mission is to support the vision of a resilient, regenerative community for our island. To that end, we are concerned about the current issues regarding vacation rentals (VR) and would like to add our comments.

First of all, we would like to thank the Council for extending the moratorium on VR permits till 1/13/2022. This extension will assist in looking at the full spectrum of issues and hopefully, allow the Council to come to some well-considered resolutions to these problems.

In addition, Transition Lopez Island (TLI) joins many concerned citizens in supporting the following proposals:

1. Institute VR permit caps for the county and specific islands. For Lopez Island, please consider lowering the cap from the proposed 174 (a 34% increase from the current number). Base this number on a thorough analysis of the carrying capacity of our islands.
2. Consider imposing a fee per night collected from VR customers to support long-term affordable housing.
3. Consider a ban on turning entire residences into VRs. To ensure VR revenues benefit local residents, we should only grant VR permits to live-in resident owners of the VR property.

Vacation rentals have impacted our island communities in numerous negative ways:

- **Resulted in gentrification of our communities**, raising the rents and housing prices, which eventually has led to a mass exodus of modest income residents. The top 20% own 90% of non-primary residences. Younger people, people providing essential services and working families represent a higher proportion of the population in the lower income tiers. Consequently, a growth in VRs will likely further aggravate the generational inequity, making it more and more difficult for these demographics to get by on the islands, despite our community's reliance on them for essential services. Those of us who live here want our communities to welcome the full spectrum of singles to families, working people to retirees.
- **Exacerbate the affordable housing crisis.** The housing market is currently so tight many people have a hard time finding housing. The new Lopez School Superintendent has had to live in a hotel in Burlington and commute daily to Lopez! Increasing the number of VRs will likely aggravate the housing shortage situation. 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. This is the role of good government - finding ways to incentivize full time rentals and discourage the choice to rent to transients.

- **Stress our fragile ecosystem**, especially our rain-fed aquifers. Off-island VR owners are unable to monitor visitor water usage and garbage production, regardless of the signs left in rental units. Before we can confidently set caps for our VR permits, we must determine the actual carrying capacity of our islands.
- **Lopez Island businesses 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 (see "gentrification" and "housing crisis" above).
- **Increasing tourism has not improved the quality of life for local residents**. We must now wait in line for over two hours for a Lopez-only ferry during the week. 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 the same services as a larger city.

We ask that you carefully consider the long-term consequences of increasing the numbers of vacation rentals when the current number is already placing enormous stress on the socio-economic and environmental systems of our islands.

Thank you for your attention to these critical issues!

Transition Lopez Island Steering Committee

Ande Finley, Chom Greacen, Scott Finley, Henning Sehmsdorf, Ron Metcalf, Mike Moore,  
Clarissa Szabados-Mish, Bob Gerfy, Liz Lafferty, Kim Foley, and Ryan Palmateer,

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