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From: Sorrel <sorrel@seventhstone.net>
Sent: Wednesday, August 18, 2021 9:09 PM
To: Vacation Rental Comments
Cc: San Juan County Council; Lynda Guernsey
Subject: Vacation rental comment from owners of haven Resterant

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I was asked to forward this letter from the Honeywells, owners of Haven Restaurant on Lopez Island.

Dear Planning Commission,

The past year and a half has obviously been a crazy ride for everyone. As a restaurant owner on this tiny island we love, it was a hard and scary one too. Initially when Covid started we shut down for some time to figure out how we were going to pivot into being a takeout only establishment; having people order efficiently and pick up their food safely. We created an online ordering system and launched it and have been running that model ever since. We looked at trying to re-open the dining room in the spring of 2021, when things were looking a little more promising, but we literally could not find the staff to do it. We asked our longtime staff to come back, and only a couple of teenagers said yes; everyone else said no. So we put up job postings in all the usual places - ones that had always served us well in the past - and got only a few applicants, the majority young teens as well. So we were unable to open. I attribute our situation and lack of ability to run our business on a few things: lack of available housing for workers and over tourism, which have both been residing issues, and the influx of new residents that have flooded the island in the past year plus.

The fire department estimated that around 1,000 new residents have migrated to Lopez since Covid began. For an island with a population of around 2,600, that is an incredible increase. There were some Covid "refugees" coming to live at their vacation home full time, and some newcomers purchasing property. Generally, the demographic of people that have moved here in the past year are not of the working class, or ones that would work in our restaurant, or at the LVM or at the school. They are high earning professionals that all of a sudden were able to work from home, retirees, or people of wealth. The people that moved here changed the island economy extremely quickly; they all want services done to their homes, and instantly created many more jobs that are higher paying than the established restaurant industry can support (unless people want their cheeseburgers to cost \$60). I had multiple former employees apologetically tell me that they couldn't come back to work for me because they were making \$30-40 an hour landscaping, house cleaning or doing construction. Even the teenagers. So in an already stressed labor environment, this made a huge shift that we felt immensely, and that left us without an option to open. Because of this influx, there have been many more people that want services from stores and restaurants too, and they have been found wanting, and sometimes hostile because of our lack of ability to meet their demand. Those people coupled with the increase in tourism has created a situation of animosity towards us, because we aren't able to provide people with a special dining experience with fantastic view on their vacation, and "after all they had endured during months of lockdown, they deserve it." There have been some people that have been extremely aggressive and downright mean, and there have been a few occasions that I have found myself uncomfortable to the point of fear. I have been called an idiot and a sheep for not having the dining room open. I have been asked how we are so bad at our jobs because they don't understand the ordering system because we book order slots, not an on demand system. The stress and the change in some of

the customers has been heartbreaking. The past year and a half have been some of the most difficult, frustrating, and scary times in our lives. But here we are, still going and full of gratitude to live in a place that we love so much - and we want to fight for it.

The vacation rental issue is a multifaceted problem, but lack of available housing for working class people is central to this. I have heard the argument being made that the houses that are being turned into vacation rentals wouldn't be long term rentals anyway, and therefore it isn't connected, but that is wrong. It is all connected. If we make the island less desirable to a person from elsewhere looking at a property on Lopez as an investment, they won't buy it. If when that person asks the real estate agent what the VR options for the property are, and they are told they cannot have a VR, they might not buy it, leaving the property open for someone that wants to move here, become part of this community, treat the island with the respect that it deserves, and hopefully become a neighbor that we will come to know and love like many of the neighbors here already. If that trend continued, then the home prices might start to lower from the ridiculous inflated balloon that they are at now, and long term residents that have worked and saved and tried for years might have a bit of a better shot at owning their own home. If there weren't as many VR's, the level of tourism might be more manageable.

I believe that increasing the cap on VR's would be a terrible, irresponsible move, and that it would further endanger the island that we all love. We do not need more visitors - we cannot handle them. We do need more full-time residents that are committed to making Lopez a better place, and capping VR's is a way to do that. There will always be tourism, but we need to control the amount of it. Where it is at now, it is unsustainable, and will continue to be unsustainable if this trend continues on its current trajectory. Look at places like Martha's Vineyard or Nantucket.

We have to ask ourselves - who do we want to see when we go to the coffeeshop in the morning, or stop by the store, or sitting at the beach? I sure enjoy running into people I know and care about, rather than faceless visitors that will be gone in a few days. Lopez Island isn't just the beautiful terrain or the vast marinas or quaint village smelling of sweet sugar in the mornings. Lopez Island is the community of amazing people, and I truly believe that if we aren't careful, it will start to slip away.

To sum up our points:

1. We cannot handle the level of tourism as it stands because we cannot run our restaurant as a restaurant at this point due to lack of staff. An increase for us is impossible/
- 2, We cannot find any employees and cannot run our business because of it. The available housing for working class people was lacking before Covid, and since Covid is had evaporated.
3. It has been extremely difficult to get off the island when we need to. Whether it is a supply run or a doctor's appointment, the mainland accessibility has become incredibly difficult and prohibitive for us.

Thank you for listening.

JK & Mariah Honeywell

Owners, Haven Restaurant

Lopez Island