

Andrea - Deputy Clerk

From: Scott Thomas <administrator@townoflaconner.org>
Sent: Thursday, August 17, 2023 7:15 AM
To: Andrea Moore; Mary Wohleb; Ivan Carlson council_2@townoflaconner.org; MaryLee Chamberlain (council_4@townoflaconner.org) (council_4@townoflaconner.org); Rick Dole (council_3@townoflaconner.org); Annie Taylor
Subject: FW: Affordable Housing vs Short Term Rentals in Residential Zone

From: Don P. <donpendleton01@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 17, 2023 6:39 AM
To: Scott Thomas <administrator@townoflaconner.org>; Michael Davolio <planner@townoflaconner.org>; Danielle Freiberger <planning@townoflaconner.org>; mayor@townoflaconner.org
Subject: Affordable Housing vs Short Term Rentals in Residential Zone

Affordable housing, the issue nearly every city and county in our region is struggling with, including La Conner. And, with the city considering new code changes, it seems the situation may only get worse.

Over the past few years, I've attended many planning commission meetings and at every meeting, the urgent need for affordable housing is discussed. Yet, instead of pursuing policies that will produce more affordable permanent housing, the town is considering encouraging even more short-term rentals by expanding the rules for short-term rentals to include the residential zone. There has already been discussion, from a local developer, to include a row of short term rentals within his affordable housing plans in the lot behind Pioneer Market. These lots are in the residential zone.

With the need and state mandate for affordable housing, why is short term housing in the residential zone even on the table? The current code already allows homeowners the flexibility of opening up their homes as bed and breakfasts so long as it is owner occupied. And accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in the residential zone can be rented out month-to-month or longer.

The existing code is clear: short-term (less than 30 days) rentals and nightly rentals are not allowed in the residential zone. That is the code that has served our community well - and that is the code on the books when the home and lot owners bought or acquired their property.

Much has been written over the past years about the impacts of short-term rentals in small towns. Among the key findings is that short term rentals for vacationers displace long-term rental housing which is a real equity issue given that home ownership has become so expensive. Additionally, short term rentals can increase neighborhood conflicts with more traffic and noise.

Of course, tourism is important to our economy. Already the commercial zone allows a lot of options for tourists: Airbnb's, VRBO's, inns and hotels in addition to several B & B's within the residential zone. The 306 Center Street project, located in the commercial zone, includes plans for adding about 5 more short term rentals on the ground floor of their condominium/apartment project. Most of these tourist accommodations are long-term businesses with deep ties to the community who also contribute a substantial share of city revenue. We need to think of their interests, too.

La Conner is a small town defined by the bordering farmland and water that has attracted a strong and diverse community. It's why this has been my home for more than 30 years. Our town plan needs to balance the importance of tourism with the needs of the people who actually live here by ensuring that our neighborhoods include affordable homes, both ownership and long-term rentals, so that families and a local workforce can afford to live here. There is a community feeling here in town. We all like where we live and feel that the balance between business and residents must be balanced, beneficial and equitable to all.

Kathy Shiner
216 N 3rd St

Please pass this on to both the Planning Commision and Town Council members as well.