

From: Emily Wood [serenitywood@gmail.com]
Sent: Saturday, June 20, 2015 12:01 PM
To: Fennell, Estelle
Subject: Letter from Sohum Re: Support Westhaven as "Village Center"

2nd District Supervisor: Estelle Fennell
825 5th Street, Room 111
Eureka, CA 95501

June 20th, 2015

Dear Ms. Fennel,

I am writing to express my staunch support for any and all proposed land use designation changes in the GPU which facilitate short term rental activity county-wide. A little background: My family resides on a ranch in Southern Humboldt. We also own a home in Westhaven. We decided to rent it to short-term tenants after bad experiences renting to long-term tenants, who would always end up using our property to indoor "grow." Thank you for this opportunity to share our perspective on these important issues. We are contacted you as well at the 5th district Supervisor because we voted for you. We are long-time fans of your support for private property rights, and we hope you will lend your support to our maintaining those rights regarding our home in Westhaven as well.

We applaud the proposed update of Westhaven from a "rural village" to "village center" land use designation, because we welcome what this change offers Westhaven and the county as a whole: greater prosperity and greater community pride. If Westhaven's proposed designation is downgraded from "village center" to "residential estates," as was suggested last week, we think that is sad, but hope it is noted that short-term rentals, like longer term rentals, are still a residential use of property, and impact Westhaven water and septic systems to an equal or probably lesser degree than full time residential use. Thus, short term rentals under a "residential estates" designation should still be a recognized private property right, and as such, facilitated as a way to enhance community potential.

However, to our family, the "village center" designation still makes the most sense, and we very much hope that this designation is enacted. No one wants to see Westhaven suddenly crowded with heavy industry, strip malls, and factories, but it is very obvious that the "village center" concept represents something very different: a "cohesive mix of residential, civic, religious, commercial, and mixed use buildings." This in so way translates to "all day noise rather than songbirds" as the "village center" critic has publicly misconstrued. The "village center" designation offers Westhaven's best chance for a vibrant, sustainable future, which is why it was proposed by our planners in the first place!

Short-term rentals are a valuable component of the "village center" vision for Westhaven. Short-term (aka "vacation" or "short stay") rental tenants already contribute greatly towards meeting Humboldt County's need for an increasingly vibrant, diversified economy. Some short-term resident tenants are traveling professionals in need of a three week home base from which to serve at the local hospital or university. Some are vacationing families shopping for a more spacious, longer term, or quieter-than-hotels haven, or desiring a more unique, authentically "local" experience than a cookie cutter chain hotel can supply. When they succeed in finding

what they need in order to linger within our county, rather than speedily passing on through, short-term tenant guests also unpack big benefits for Humboldt County :

--**Hefty Boost to our Local Economy:** 1) Short-term rentals: A source of supplemental income to homeowners free from the the carbon footprint/other problems caused by grow lights in the garage. Extra income for Humboldt homeowners will flow towards all other Humboldt businesses. 2) From grocery stores to galleries, from gas stations to gift shops, short term tenant families eat, shop, explore, and SPEND, which equals thriving local businesses of all types, which equals JOBS.

-- **Beautification and Pride:** Property owners, when exercising their right to offer short-term rental stays, naturally strive to enhance the aesthetic appeal of their property. Thus these homes stay in a state of style and tip-top repair, tangibly raising neighborhood pride (along with property values) for all.

--**Tax Funds to Help the County:** Short-term rentals present a much-needed source of TOT (Transient Occupancy Tax) funds to help the Humco stay afloat and provide the services we all desire and expect. Our county's budgetary needs are great. Now isn't the time to cripple ourselves by waving goodbye to more potential TOT funds.

The current General Plan Update contains some land use designation changes, such as Westhaven becoming a "village center," which would help Humboldt to benefit from short stay rentals. A "residential estates" designation could still do the same, if the county recognizes the fact that renting your property to short term tenants, just as to long-term tenants, is still a residential use of that property. Big thanks to Ryan Sundberg and the other Supervisors for their hard work in creating a GPU that points Humboldt County toward a brighter future. National data from 2013 tells us that a ninety percent majority of Americans believe that short-term rentals bring meaningful tourism and much needed tax dollars to our local communities. (stradvocay.com, 2013).

However, a vocal minority of one seeks to curtail a property owner's right to use their home as a short-term rental in Westhaven. Before closing, we would like to comment on the criticisms this person recently aired. Specifically, we will outline ways in which the publicly stated arguments against short-term rentals (5/30/15 letter to the Time Standard by Mara Parker) of this vocal "not in my backyard" type critic are erroneous, unfounded, and overstated.

Traffic, garbage, and noise (plus water!): Ms. Parker, in a radio spot and newspaper comment, warns of "excessive noise, trash, and traffic" where short-term rentals are allowed. This assumption is not based on fact. Though not mentioned by Ms. Parker, we also would like to add in facts about the POSITIVE impact short-term verses long-term/full time residential use can have towards maintaining an ample Westhaven water supply.

On the concern of increased noise, a salient point is that only a tiny percentage of short term rentals allow pets, whereas more than half of regular Humboldt households have noisy pets like dogs....and chickens! Thus short-term rental residences are likely to be LESS noisy due to the absence of pets.

By mentioning an "excessive noise" concern, Ms. Parker is possibly meaning that she just fears being 'disturbed' in any way by short-term tenants, more than she would be disturbed by regular long-term tenants or homeowner neighbors. We would like to address this potential

concern. We believe that it can be well mitigated by Ms. Parker being given the following information: Short stay rental guests sign contracts before arrival stating that they will have no parties, will observe regular quiet hours, will be considerate of neighbors, and will follow all local ordinances... or be asked by managers to leave immediately. Offenders are banned, never allowed to return.

Sadly, your regular neighbors who may occasionally disturb you in a rude or just insensitive way will probably NOT be required by any magical manager to disappear forever.... Thus, the risk of continually suffering greater disturbance at the hands of short stay tenants is very arguably NOT greater than the risk of those disturbances coming from any other neighborhood source. In fact, due to motivational factor of contracts signed (containing rules enforced by managers) and hundreds of forfeitable security deposit dollars hanging out in the wind, the disturbance risk from short stayers may be significantly LESS likely than from other types of neighbors. When logical thinking is applied, complaints of increased disturbance don't hold up to scrutiny.

"Excessive" traffic and garbage warnings don't hold water either. Short term rental guests are intermittent: there are gaps between guests, not people there 7 days a month all year. Short term resident guests are often on a more relaxed schedule than typical residents, and have fewer obligations--usually no appointments, most often NOT commuting to jobs or to school, often driving in and out mostly for recreational needs. A typical family, in residence FULL time, and commuting to workplace(s), school (s), school activities like sports, appointments, and errands, on top of recreational needs, would be expected to create MORE in and out traffic, simply due to their greater scheduled obligations, plus the fact of their house being occupied for more days per year total. From this comparison it follows that intermittent short term occupants should create LESS, not more, "excessive" traffic than the typical families of today. Let's be sure to note that these intermittent, short-term residential rentals also impact Westhaven's water supply LESS than 24/7, full-time residential use does.

Similarly, because no short stay house is occupied as many hours per year as a full time resident family, less total hours of humans in house means proportionally less water use, PLUS less garbage. Short stay management companies have an employees hired to deal with garbage and recycling speedily and properly, since trashy homes won't appeal to potential guests. There IS no extra amount of garbage generated OR left, so Ms. Parker's claim of 'excessive' garbage as a reason to reject the economic boon of short-term rentals has zero basis.

Stranger-Danger: Mara Parker, the vocal critic we have been referencing, in her letter to the Times Standard on May 30th, expressed worry about the presence of strangers where short-term tenants are permitted. Specifically, Ms. Parker wrote, "I also wonder how many registered and non-registered sex offenders are visiting my neighborhood as "vacation renters."

We would like to submit for your consideration that this type of "stranger-danger" argument against short stay rentals falls short, feels short-sighted, and would serve to short-change Humboldt County residents if we allowed it to have any influence.

The vacationing families and visiting professionals seeking short stay rentals in our beautiful redwood destination have IN NO INSTANCE been linked with an increase in any type of crime, including sexual offense type crime, during their stays. Sadly, studies conclude that ninety percent of the time, the type of crime Ms. Parker makes mention of is perpetrated by acquaintances or family members. Thus, according to real data, Ms. Parker's insinuation that

sex offenders are present in greater concentrations where “vacation renters” are permitted is incorrect and just befuddling. If anything, the gloomy evidence would point towards the opposite assumption.

This “stranger danger” sentence figures prominently in Ms Mara’s brief argument against the proposed land use designation change for Westhaven in the GPU. It’s not based on any research or reality and just designed to scare us, thus we feel that her use of this tactic is a sensationalized bid to gain sympathy for her own narrow desire to hold back positive progress.

We do believe there is one “stranger danger” here, but it’s not Ms. Parker’s idea of looming sex offenders pretending to be on vacation.

It is the danger that we could allow the erroneous assumptions and sensationalism of a few to slam Humboldt's door on opportunity. Instead, let’s help Humboldt communities host these “strangers”--these travelling professionals and vacationers who want to appreciate and SPEND in Humboldt, but whose needs can’t be met by hotels.

Let’s look past wild, unfounded stranger-danger tales, welcome these strangers to our land, and turn them into friends! Friends of our county whose patronage can be pivotal in supporting a more vibrant, diversified, prosperous local economy that’s all based on our community pride in this beautiful place!

The GPU land use element changes, such as the proposed change of Westhaven from a “rural village” to “village center” designation, is a prime example of the the kind of foresight and local-economy-supportive changes we need. The less much desirable change to “residential estates,” if it recognizes short term rentals as a valuable, permitted residential use, could still would line up with a great outcome for Westhaven and our county. Unlike brand new, heavy industrial development that some fear, short term renting is a residential activity using homes that are already there, and that might otherwise stand empty or be used as "grow" houses by long term tenants. This intermittent short-term use translates to less water use overall, which is a good thing for Westhaven's water supply. And perhaps most importantly, the choice whether to rent your home to long term or short term tenants should be the right of that property's owner. Please vote to support property rights in Westhaven, as you do for Southern Humboldt so successfully. We support you, Estelle, and all of the Supervisors in going forward with the "village center" for Westhaven OR any change that supports short-term rental use rights, and also truly appreciate this opportunity to comment on these important matters during the GPU process.

Respectfully,

Emily Wood and Family

For Your Reference: 5/30 letter to the Times Standard by Mara Parker:

[Note: Ms. Parker incorrectly names Westhaven Vacation Rentals as "illegal," when in fact they are simply "unregulated."]

Keep vacation rentals out of Westhaven

The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors is trying to change the land use designation of Westhaven in their General Plan Update from a “rural village” to a “village center.” This would

allow vacation rentals and other businesses in residential areas where they are now currently illegal to operate (but still do without any enforcement).

The definition of a “village center”: The core of a traditional settlement, typically comprised of a cohesive mix of residential, civic, religious, commercial, and mixed use buildings, arranged along a main street and intersecting streets that are within walking distance for residents who live within and surrounding the core.

I do not want to live in a neighborhood with commercial businesses or vacation rentals. My property is already sandwiched by two illegal vacation rentals. There is excessive noise, trash, and traffic already in this once sleepy neighborhood. I also wonder how many registered and non-registered sex offenders are visiting my neighborhood as “vacation renters.”

If Humboldt County residents do not agree with the changes the county supervisors have made to land use designation mapping, there will be a workshop on June 9 from 6-9 p.m. at Azalea Hall in McKinleyville. There will also be two hearings: June 22 and July 27 from 11 a.m.-7 p.m. at the Board of Supervisors’ chambers in Eureka. You may also email a letter to the Board of Supervisors and Planning & Building Department: gpu@co.humboldt.ca.us.

Mara Parker, Westhaven