



Linda Ely/The Astorian

The county development code only recognizes vacation rentals in Arch Cape.

County commissioners advance vacation rental ordinance

By ERICK BENDEL
The Astorian

AS THE OREGON COAST HAS MARKETED ITSELF AS AN ATTRACTIVE DESTINATION, COASTAL ECONOMIES HAVE COME TO COUNT ON TOURIST DOLLARS. SOME NEIGHBORHOODS HAVE FELT THE PRESSURES OF VISITORS MORE THAN OTHERS.

The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners last week voted to advance an ordinance that would allow vacation rentals in unincorporated areas where many rentals already operate.

The ordinance would add rental units of 30 or fewer days to the county's development code, making them a permitted use in 16 zones — from Knappa and Svensen to Clatsop Plains to Cove Beach. More than 170 vacation rentals operate in the unincorporated portions of the county, but only in Arch Cape — a zone that has allowed them for almost 20 years — does the development code mention them.

Approving the change would codify an existing practice — to the dismay of residents, particularly in the Cove Beach neighborhood, where vacation rentals compose roughly a third of homes. Several residents there had hoped county commissioners would ban vacation rentals from residential zones.

The first reading comes weeks after commissioners updated vacation rental operating standards meant to help prevent troublesome behavior, such as loud noise and littering, among visitors.

Commissioner John Toyooka said that enforcement of those standards is the overriding concern in his exchanges with residents. "There are compliance issues we must attend to, and I think as a board we have to look at that very closely," he said.

As the Oregon Coast has marketed itself as an attractive destination, coastal economies have come to count on tourist dollars. Some neighborhoods have felt the pressures of visitors more than others. As vacation rentals have multiplied on the North Coast, some residents fear that too many rentals will strain the natural environment and make quiet beach living impossible.

The county has held about two dozen meetings, from town halls to work sessions, on the issue since late 2019.

In April, the county extended a moratorium on new vacation rentals. The freeze is set to expire in late August, but could end sooner if the county settles the matter before then. A second reading on the ordinance will be held on June 22.

Nuanced conversations

Viviane Simon-Brown, a Cove Beach resident, told commissioners on Wednesday that, despite the lengthy public process, the county "has missed every opportunity to achieve lasting, viable, collaborative results our communities could live with."

She said the county spent too much time focusing on the minutia of operating standards and avoided deeper discussions about the impact of vacation rentals on natural resources and the character of neighborhoods.

"Did we ever have the opportunity for nuanced conversations about what is a community? No. The pub-

lic process forced us into, 'You're either for or against short-term rentals.' There is no way to discuss the huge differences between neighbors renting and investment companies.

"Yes, you chose the process. Yes, you chose the structure. You determined the outcome," she continued. "However, it's not over. That's a promise."

Nancy Chase, who has owned a vacation rental in Cove Beach for decades, long before the advent of Airbnb and other online platforms, supported the ordinance, saying it clarifies the status of vacation rentals in residential zones, including those that have historically had part-time getaway homes.

"My view as an owner of a residence is that, if I have the right to rent my house for 30 days, why is it then illegal, or could be illegal, if I rent it for 29 days as a short-term rental?" she said. "I think it's a residential property right."

Commissioner Pamela Wev voted against holding a first reading. Echoing desires expressed by some residents and planning commissioners, she said she wanted the board to consider limiting the number of vacation rentals in certain areas.

"Almost everyone agrees that there should be some kind of a cap in order to maintain the livability and the residential integrity of the zones," she said.

Wev recently indicated she favored a Planning Commission recommendation — one no longer before the board — that would have allowed vacation rentals in commercial and multifamily residential zones, along with Arch Cape, but prohibit them in other residential zones.

That recommendation would have phased out vacation rentals in Cove Beach and other neighborhoods as permits expire. It would also eventually have eliminated about half a million dollars in lodging taxes, according to the county's Department of Assessment and Taxation.

Property rights

Wev said she wanted to withdraw the ordinance. She has called it a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

"It's not even a compromise," she told her fellow commissioners. "I think it's

just not the direction that we should be going in when we talk about zoning in rural places in Clatsop County."

Commissioner Courtney Bangs does not view the vacation rental ordinance as bringing about sweeping changes, but as preserving the status quo, since scores of vacation rentals already populate the landscape.

"I want to support the people that live within my district and who have reached out to me out of fear that we would somehow remove their livelihood from them in this process," said Bangs, who represents the eastern portion of the county.

She and Commissioner Lianne Thompson expressed concerns about violating owners' property rights. They both raised the specter of litigation if the county banned vacation rentals.

Noting the relative wealth of some people who oppose vacation rentals in their neighborhoods, Thompson said, "I've heard a lot about people's rights — and they're talking not only about their rights for their property, they're talking about their right to control their neighbor's property," Thompson said. "That's legal territory that we consider very carefully."

In a 3 to 1 decision, Thompson, Bangs and Toyooka voted to advance the ordinance, while Wev voted "no." Mark Kujala, the commission's chairman, was absent.



Mary Altaffer/AP Photo

More than 75% of respondents said the pandemic had a negative effect on their mental health.

Tired, worried, frustrated — county residents share views on pandemic

By ERICK BENDEL
The Astorian

ON A QUESTION ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S WELFARE, 78% PERCENT OF PARENTS SAID THE PANDEMIC HAS HURT THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION, AND ALMOST 77% SAID IT HAS HURT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH.

How do Clatsop County residents feel about the coronavirus pandemic? Tired.

That was the most common answer given by participants in an anonymous county Public Health Department survey. Of 421 people who answered the question, 182 — 43% — felt that way.

The second-most common feeling, shared by 38% of respondents, was worry and concern. Frustration came in third at 30%.

The survey results arrived as virus cases in the county began to spike after steadily climbing since mid-April. Dozens of new virus cases have appeared over the last week, according to the county.

The health department decided to conduct a survey gauging public attitudes toward the virus, and the response to it, when the county's booster rate failed to track with the county's vaccination rate, which at more than 74% is among the highest in Oregon.

Margo Lulich, the county's interim public health director, said the survey results confirm this trend.

The survey, which opened in April and ended May 30, was not designed to be scientific. The results are also skewed by self-selection bias: The people most likely to participate are also more likely to be engaged in the issues and have strong feelings about them that may not reflect those of the larger community.

But the survey results did have information the

Public Health Department can use, Lulich said.

One thing the department learned: While respondents overwhelmingly said they had enough information on vaccines, the county may need to do a better job of providing info on how to get treatment for COVID-19.

A question asked respondents about the impact of the pandemic on their lives.

More than 75% said the pandemic had a negative effect on their mental health, and just over 51% said it was bad for their physical health. Thirty-four percent said the pandemic hurt their financial situation, and almost 38% said it had a negative effect on their family relationships. About two-thirds of respondents said the pandemic had no effect on their employment.

"We haven't had time to fully process the impact of the pandemic on our lives because we've been in a status of uncertainty, and we've been coping," Lulich said.

The health department was also curious about parents' decision about whether to vaccinate their children against COVID-19.

Among parents of children 12 to 17 years old, almost 64% said their child

had received at least one vaccine dose, while almost 32% said they are "definitely not getting" their child vaccinated.

Of the parents choosing not to vaccinate their 12- to 17-year-olds, 34% said they don't trust that the vaccines are safe, while 32% said they don't believe their child's age group is at risk.

Among parents of children ages 5 to 11, more than 61% said their child already had one or more jabs. The group "definitely not getting" their young children vaccinated was almost 34%.

Of these parents, about 36% don't trust in the vaccines' safety, and more than 38% don't believe the age group is at risk.

For parents of children under 5, almost 49% said they're "definitely not" getting their child vaccinated.

On a question about their children's welfare, 78% percent of parents said the pandemic has hurt their children's education, and almost 77% said it has hurt their mental health.

That question had only 92 respondents. "But I bet if everyone completed the survey, it probably wouldn't change that much," Lulich said.

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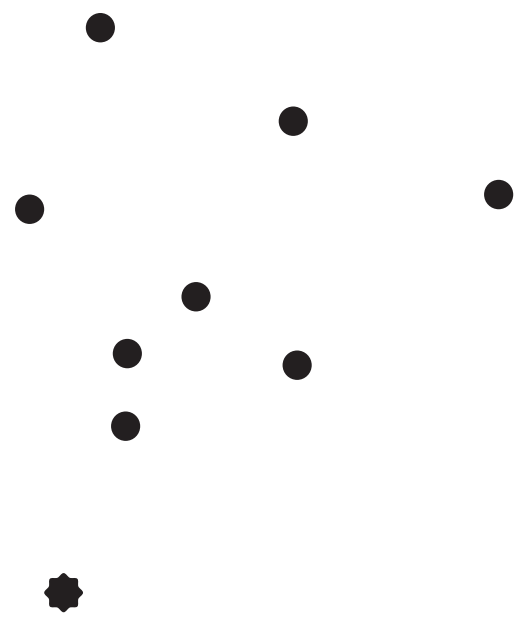
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