

Date: September 28, 2023  
To: Trustees: Hornby LTC; Denman LTC; Islands Trust Council  
From: Sharon Small, Denman Resident/Retired Business College Professor

Subject: Support of APC Recommendations for Short-Term Vacation to Minimize Infrastructure Stress for Denman Islanders

The Hornby Economic Enhancement group's (HICEEC) resolve to keep the short-term rental bylaw unchanged and expand into the remaining months of the year would significantly impact an already overburdened infrastructure— Denman terminal-to-terminal roads and the *Baynes Sound Connector*. Thus, most Denman residents would support the Advisory Planning Commission's recommendations to reduce the months of operation from the current five to the original three and to require Temporary Use Permits. These changes would control and balance the number of economically valued short-term rentals with our shared preserve and protect mandate and Denman's OCP transportation bylaw on minimizing negative traffic impacts.

The following rebuttal to the HICEEC Vice Chair's claims illuminates the profound influence the present volume of Hornby tourist traffic has on the infrastructure.

**The HICEEC Vice-Chair recommends keeping the OCP Bylaw on short-term rentals unchanged because self-regulation works.**

**Fact:** The number of short-term rentals since the 2014 bylaw was approved has increased from 14 to estimates of between 80 and 120, with many others operating illegally throughout the year and without oversight. In response to a concern that more short-term rentals would affect affordable housing numbers, the Vice-Chair (and Consultant Patricia Mulroney) claim there's no data linking short-term rentals with the affordable housing crisis. In fact, published university and B.C government research strongly contradict this view.

**FACT:** In 2019 Dr. David Wachsmuth, Canada Research Chair of Urban Governance at McGill University, contributed to the first comprehensive study correlating the rapid growth of short-term rentals to the decline in affordable housing. His research, which focused on Tofino and a number of other B.C. communities, concluded that **too many short-term rentals are not licensed (one half, according to an Airbnb study); that they drive up rent; and that they are responsible for removing 19.1% housing rentals from the market (Sept. 21. 2023 Bloomberg).** In addition to documenting the trend towards commercial operations, his data concluded that short-term rentals are increasing 17.8% each year and are responsible for renters paying 20% more for rent. In June of this year, he found that of 28,510 active listings, 16,810 were taken off the long-term rental market ([CTVnews.ca](https://www.ctvnews.ca/2023/09/21/short-term-rentals-impact-affordable-housing-in-bc/) September 21, 2023).

The Joint Union of B.C. Municipalities and the Province of B.C. Advisory Group on Short-Term Rentals Report concludes that **short-term rentals have a “staggering” impact on affordable housing**. This report confirms that short-term rentals removed more than 16,000 B.C. homes from the residential rental pool ([UBCM.ca](https://www.ubcm.ca) June 30, 2021). Cortes Island, with a population similar to Hornby’s, conducted a study that also directly links the decline in affordable housing and increases in rental instability to the growth of short-term rentals (CBC News, August 14, 2023). Anecdotal and circumstantial evidence on Hornby support these conclusions.

**FACT:** Given the dramatic effect short-term rentals have on the current housing crisis, the B.C. Minister of Housing is scheduled to introduce strong legislation this Fall implementing the Joint Advisory Group’s recommendations. **Changes could include eliminating commercially run short-term rentals; requiring rental platforms like Airbnb to confirm business licences; and requiring communities to collect short-term rental data to be shared in a Provincial data base (June 30, 2021 Final Report of Priorities for Action [UBCM.ca](https://www.ubcm.ca)).**

**FACT:** The above statistics strongly argue that the steady increase in Hornby tourist vehicles travelling across Denman since 2017 is connected to increases in legal and illegal short-term rentals. The BCF Annual Report to March 2023 states that of the short routes, only Routes 21 and 22 showed a significant revenue increase. Traffic statistics from 2017 to the present show steady increases of up to 9.91%. In May 2023, 13,100 vehicles represented a 17.88% increase from 2022 and in June, 15,114 vehicles represented a 9.34% increase. Once the traffic statistics for the last three months are posted, they should support what ferry staff and Denman residents experienced —that the number of tourist related vehicles keeps increasing.

**FACT:** The tens of thousands of vehicles and numerous service trucks supporting the Hornby tourist economy generally race back and forth across Denman. Unless you live on the Denman speedway between the ferry terminals, you cannot imagine the assault such high numbers of vehicles— in July 2022 18,147 and in August 19,625—have on our formerly tranquil community. Also, too many drivers engage in reckless driving to get ahead of the ferry line even when the two ferries at Denman West were running. Service vehicles that cannot manage the Denman Road hill and many racing Hornby drivers render the alternative multi-use Lacon/McFarland route treacherous for local drivers, walkers, and cyclists.

**FACT:** The problem Hornby traffic is creating for Denman is recorded on the BCF Denman Community Page. The major concern of the 170 residents who attended the May 26 BCF facilitated roundtable event is **safety and quality of life**. A full summary and online survey of the experiences islanders shared about encounters with terminal-to-terminal recklessness, soon to be posted, will verify

the frustration, anger, and despair Denman residents feel about an escalating problem that violates our preserve and protect mandate and OCP bylaw on transportation.

**THE HICEEC Vice-Chair questions whether short-term rentals have an effect on ferry space.**

**FACT:** This question could be easily answered with a credible up-to-date survey of how many illegal and legal short-term rentals are currently operating and what percentage of the total tourist traffic volume short-term rentals represent. What is known, however, is that too many tourist vehicles towing trailers and RVs and tourist industry service vehicles take up from two to even four ferry spaces and that the wait times are excessive. Residents moved to Denman because of a desire to live in a tranquil, rural environment with easy ferry access to off island jobs, schools, services, and hospitals. However, residents who live on the speedway to Hornby no longer enjoy a tranquil environment and Islanders no longer have assured ferry boarding at Buckley Bay or at Denman West without long wait times.

**FACT:** The backed up traffic forces many residents to avoid ferry travel when Hornby tourist traffic is expected to be high. Particularly frustrated, are off island workers and families with children going to school or participating in off island activities. One summer Sunday when covering a three hour shift at the Art Centre, I observed the major intersection into Denman Village frequently clogged with Hornby vehicles that often reached to Lacon Road. The single remaining lane cannot accommodate coming and going local and offloaded ferry traffic. When traffic was moving, drivers continued to race through the Northwest intersection, violating the 30 mph speed limit. Most importantly, this backed up traffic and speeding creates peril for our ambulance and fire truck drivers, local drivers, and cyclists who are forced to use one single lane.

**FACT:** Businesses and artisans complain that excessive wait times at either Buckley Bay or Denman West have a strong negative effect on revenue. They are paying directly for increases in delivery and service costs and indirectly for wait times that cut into work time when making trips off island to pick up or deliver supplies. Excessive ferry wait time is also reducing day visitor revenue. Not so many years ago, large groups of senior cyclists regularly visited Denman in the high season to circumnavigate the island, visit craft studios, shop and eat. Most now avoid Denman as do many day visitors from the Comox Valley and Parksville area.

**FACT:** Since the round table meeting, BCF has made changes to mitigate the impact of Hornby tourist traffic on the infrastructure. They hired extra flaggers at the Denman West Terminal and often, but not consistently, monitor the flow of traffic so that it does not back up at both Denman terminals to gridlock major

intersections. Although the two ferry system improved service during the week, it did not alter the traffic volume problems.

The Friends of Denman Forests, the group that galvanized community support around the traffic volume issue last winter, emphasize that changes to the Gravelly Bay Terminal cannot be made until the infrastructure issue is managed. They support, along with those who attended the May round table event, the need for a direct ferry to Hornby as the only long-term option for Denman (see the BCF Denman Community Page). In the meantime, both islands are saddled with a dysfunctional and inadequate cable ferry until the next budget cycle in four years.

Pulitzer Prize winner Wallace Stegner writes, “All sins are sins of excess.” Denman is suffering from an excess of Hornby tourist traffic. Approval of the Advisory Planning Commission’s recommendations, therefore, should result in fewer short-term rentals and a significant reduction of traffic volume. Also, by enforcing licensing, Hornby would be in compliance with other Trust islands, communities and cities across Canada, and the forthcoming B.C. Ministry of Housing legislation on short-term rentals.

Until there is strong oversight and regulation of Hornby short-term rentals, Denman’s preserve and protect mandate and OCP remain compromised and the infrastructure dramatically overburdened.

Respectfully,

Sharon Small,  
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