

Another Perspective on Hornby STVRs

As a full-time resident and property owner who has rented out our small guest cabin occasionally, I have watched with growing dismay the current Islands Trust process of approving STVRs on Hornby over the last few years. While attempting to solve a thorny situation of excessive summer visitors and a shortage of year-round homes, I believe there are big gaps in the current strategy that shut out a significant percentage of the island's population.

I heartily agree that all short-term rentals should have adequate, clean water and approved septic services, and I agree in principle with most of the recommendations of the APC regarding this issue. However, I have found that the recent process of determining what makes a legal STVR has bypassed a significant percentage of the resident population and will primarily reward off-island property owners who can afford second homes that often sit vacant. We are missing an opportunity for vacation home rentals that already exist, often on small lots, with on-site resident managers. Looking at our Islands Trust Land Use by-law 150, eliminating the restriction of the one-dwelling unit per small lot could alleviate some of our housing demand, while allowing STVRs managed by resident owners.

I am aware there are many full-time Hornby residents, living on lots less than 1.0 hectare (but greater than .1 hectare) who have accessory buildings suitable for long-term or short-term rentals on their properties. These dwellings are currently not legal as housing or vacation rental. Many of these residents, me included, would like to be able to provide short term rentals to summer guests to supplement retirement income. According to the zoning regulations, these secondary units could be used legally as a bed & breakfast home-based business, if the principal (or secondary) residence is occupied by the property owners. This seems to me to be an excellent model for small units of STVRs and they have the added bonus of an on-site manager, which would greatly reduce the problem of over-renting and noise by-law complaints.

By changing the land use by-laws to permit a secondary dwelling unit on smaller lots, Hornby Island would be able to legally accommodate small groups of summer vacation rentals (particularly singles and couples who don't need a large home) and may also provide long-term rental to some residents in need of better housing. It is no secret that many, many people here are housed in sub-standard and illegal accommodations. By legalizing up to one extra small dwelling on every lot of at least 0.1 hectare, we could bring property owners with these existent dwellings into compliance, provide much-needed accommodations to summer visitors, seasonal workers or caregivers, and prevent problematic STVRs.

From the by-law: 3.7 Vacation Home Rental Uses (

1) Vacation home rental uses must be in accordance with the following limitations:
(b) ... on any lot permitted two dwelling units, one dwelling unit may be occupied by paying guests at any time, provided that an owner or tenant is resident in **a second lawful dwelling unit** on the lot during the vacation home rental occupancy.

I understand some folks may think that relaxing the zoning regulations to allow two dwellings on small lots may spur on a building boom and create urban style crowding on our rural island. This is far from what I am suggesting, given that up to 30 dwelling units could be built on a half-acre lot in Vancouver. Aside from the exorbitant cost to build a dwelling today, I think we could set reasonable limits to this density increase. Two dwellings per half-acre, respecting the lot coverage restriction, is not high-density housing. If caps on STVR numbers go into effect, it is reasonable to think that some of these second dwellings would become much-needed long-term housing.

I see that Mayne Island has adopted Flexible Housing Zoning and I suggest Hornby Island look at doing something similar, that would include our majority of small, approximately half-acre lots, and allowing proportionately appropriate short-term rentals. Of course, ensuring adequate water and septic service would also apply.

From the By-Law: PART 8 ZONE REGULATIONS

Permitted Uses (1) The following uses are permitted... (a) residential use of a dwelling; (b) residential use of a recreational vehicle; (c) accessory uses, buildings and structures, including but not limited to home occupations; and (d) vacation home rental use... 3) Lot coverage must not exceed ...15% of any lot having an area of less than 1.0 hectare.

The benefit of having on site vacation rental management cannot be overstated. In all the Islands Trust discussion of what will make a legal STVR on Hornby Island, I have not seen anything that addresses problematic over-filling of rental houses and excessive noise from vacationers. Having property owners on site would be a good way to mitigate these problems.

I would suggest postponing the decision about STVR permits, cap numbers and such until the option of adopting flexible density is examined more closely and put to a public vote. If these issues are too disparate to be combined in any one session, then I request the zoning density be looked at separately, and as soon as possible. I see revising our land density regulations as a practical way to address housing shortages.

Liz Earle
Owner of a Small Lot in the Galleon Beach Area