

September 12, 2017

Dear LOCAC Members,

My name is Dr. Jean Wetzel, and I have lived in Los Osos for 20 years now, having moved here from the Seattle area to take a tenure-track job at Cal Poly in 1996. I have heard that there is a debate going on right now about the future of short-term vacation rental housing in Los Osos, and I'd like to add a little perspective from the viewpoint of a long-term renter who is against short-term vacation rentals.

When I moved here in 1996, I was hopeful about being able to put down roots in the SLO County area while pursuing my career as a tenure-track professor at Cal Poly. I was shocked to find that purchasing a house in SLO proper, or even renting there, was even more expensive than in Seattle. So I made the decision to rent in Los Osos, which at the time was slightly more reasonable and affordable. Little did I know at the time that rents and housing prices in Los Osos would also skyrocket at a much faster rate than my salary as an Associate Professor at Cal Poly. (Our salaries were essentially frozen from 2002-2012.) I'm now an Associate Professor Emeritus (i.e., semi-retired) and find myself a uniquely SLO County phenomenon: a member of the highly educated, working poor – the latter being a result of housing and rental prices. I haven't a prayer of ever being a real part of the community through becoming a homeowner, and the rental prices here are becoming so high that I'm planning to move back to the Northwest as soon as I finish a part-time teaching contract at Cal Poly, as I can barely afford rent here now either. Essentially, my California Dream has been obliterated by the consistent lack of affordable housing, and I find that I've wasted 20 years living here as a migrant worker with a PhD.

I realize that there are many complex factors that contribute to the lack of affordable housing on the Central Coast, even for highly educated workers like myself. The wealthy, who buy up affordable housing to create rental income are a part of the problem. Many of these rental houses do provide homes for families and individuals like myself who are a valuable part of the SLO County work force. For that, I have been grateful. But wasting badly needed rental homes on short-term vacation rentals is wrong on so many levels. It hurts highly skilled workers like me, who need an affordable place to live. It also hurts the homeowners who live in neighborhoods with the vacation rentals. Who would you rather have next to you on weekends: a quiet individual or family with one or two cars, or revolving bayside bachelor parties?

As mentioned above, I have given up on this area ever being economically hospitable to me. However, I hope that the Committee will think of the long-term character of Los Osos, as well as the quality of life of its fortunate and privileged homeowners and long-term renters, when making its decision about allowing short-term vacation rentals. Your Dream may be at stake too.

Jean Wetzel, PhD