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Trustees and President of the Empire Village Council -

This letter is quite long and need not be read aloud at a Council meeting. It should, however, be reproduced in the ePacket for the meeting,

I want to chime in in support of my neighbors who recently submitted a letter to the Short Term Rentals (STRs) Committee, a letter that was forwarded to the Council despite being addressed to the Committee. As a resident and voter in Empire, I feel that there should be regulation of STRs. Most homeowners who do rent out their houses short term (“landlords”) are conscientious about it, and most visitors who rent those houses (“lessees”) are well behaved, but there have been counterexamples. To assure good behavior all around, we need regulation.

Here are some of my opinions:

- (1) STRs should be allowed only under permits issued by the Village. Permits should be valid for a fixed period to be determined by the Council. At the end of that time, a landlord should have to reapply for a permit. Permits should not be transferable by sale or inheritance. A new owner of a home should have to apply for a permit.
- (2) The number of STRs should be capped. Landlords currently renting out their homes should be grandfathered in. No current landlord should be regulated out. That suggests that the cap should be at or slightly above the current number or percentage of STRs currently in the village. However, the exact number is a matter for the Council to determine. At present Empire has the highest percentage of STRs of any Leelanau County municipality.
- (3) There should be an annual fee for landlords. The fee should be large enough to cover the cost of enforcing regulation. It remains to be seen exactly who would be responsible for the collection of fees and enforcement of other regulations. Landlords found to be in violation of regulations, after being given a chance to show compliance, should lose their permits. A prospective or current landlord’s financial concerns should not be a consideration in the issue of a permit.
- (4) There must be a limit to how many people may accompany a lessee to a rented home. This should be a function of the number of bedrooms in the home, two people per bedroom including offspring, adoptees, legal wards, and guests. This should be stated explicitly in rental agreements. It would be a good idea to involve the local fire department in setting these limits. No basement without an up-to-code alternate egress should be eligible for occupancy.
- (5) Arguments about the possibility of using a house as an STR having a positive effect on marketability may or may not be accurate, but they ignore the negative effect the proximity of an STR may have on the value or marketability of nearby homes.

The elected members of the Village Council are supposed to represent the interests of the Village as a whole and the voting residents, a large majority of whom are not STR landlords, and not just the interests of area realty agents, businessmen, and absentee STR landlords. Imposition of regulations does not mean that STRs would not be allowed in Empire. Regulating STRs in the Village might make things a bit more complex for the minority of voters who derive financial benefit from STRs, but it would be a step forward for the majority of Empire residents.

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