

BUSINESS

Ukee adopts new B and B restrictions

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Following a lengthy and heated exchange last week, Ucluelet's municipal council officially passed a bylaw bringing new restrictions to bed and breakfasts in a 3-2 vote.

The bylaw's new mandates include bed and breakfasts being operated by the property's principal resident and within one single family dwelling per lot that does not include a daycare or community care facility.

Bed and breakfasts may operate up to three rooms with a maximum of two guests per room and the gross floor area of the business cannot exceed 35 per cent of the residence.

Guest rooms cannot contain cooking appliances other than a microwave, toaster, kettle and coffee maker. Off-street parking must be provided.

Ucluelet's council seemed unanimously in favour of those new mandates while speaking to the bylaw at their Sept. 6 regular meeting, but passionately butted heads over new requirements around bed and breakfasts needing to be accessed through a home's main entrance.

The new rule stipulates that guest rooms can have secondary exterior entryways, but those cannot serve as a primary access point and operating remotely with coded entry locks or key lock boxes is prohibited.

Coun. Marilyn McEwen and Coun. Rachele Cole both expressed opposition to prohibiting separate primary entrances to guest suites.

McEwen operates a local guest house and said travellers' behaviours are changing, particularly since the coronavirus pandemic, with communal breakfasts and shared entryways no longer considered attractive.

"Before 2020, I met 100 per cent of my guests," McEwen said. "The pandemic actually changed all that. People wanted a self check-in. They didn't want to meet me or anyone else on the property. Now it's changing back a little bit and I'm probably meeting about 50 per cent of my guests. It has changed and people don't want to share a door into my house. They want their own entrance."

Cole also opposed axing separate entrances and cautioned against making too many changes too quickly.

"I think we should do some of these things now and I think we should let some things simmer for a bit until we see how the first things roll out," she said. "I don't think we have to move everything forward right now. I don't think that making some of these decisions are going to solve our long-term housing or our short term housing (problem). This isn't the solution."

Mayor Mayco Noel acknowledged the new bylaw isn't perfect, but suggested it is a necessary first step.

"What are we afraid of here? I'm more afraid of us not doing something," Noel said.

He noted that anyone currently op-



Ucluelet's municipal council passed a bylaw bringing new restrictions to local bed and breakfasts in a split decision vote last week. (Black Press Media file photo)

"We don't want a community of short term rentals."

– Jennifer Hoar

erating a bed and breakfast would be grandfathered in and the new bylaw would only affect new bed and breakfasts, which he believes are proliferating beyond control.

He added that without the new bylaw, newcomers could arrive to Ucluelet and open up mini-hotels with no say from the neighbours they're building beside.

"Our responsibility is land use, it's not a person who's got a sob story about why they need to be here or why they bought a lot. I don't know who buys a lot thinking of coming to a community to open up a nightly rental, or three of them, beside someone who has no say. That's what we're talking about here. We're talking about people who have no say in what's going on," he said, adding bed and breakfasts should not be relied upon as a primary income.

"Maybe I'm hanging onto the past because I kind of like the way Ucluelet is. I don't think it's always supposed to be easy for people to make employment here. The people that live on the West Coast have found creative ways to make employment," he said.

He suggested local homes are being bought and repurposed into rental properties that are more comparable to motels than quaint bed and breakfasts.

"Thinking that we shouldn't be leaving this room today without a fundamental change about how we believe the community should look, I think we're doing an injustice and I think we're losing time because it's a floodgate coming," he said.

He added that in his eight years on council, he hasn't heard any desire for more vacation rentals.

"Not once did I ever hear anybody come here saying, 'We need to pro-

mote more nightly rentals in residential areas'... For some reason, we're talking like it should be a priority. It's not for me," he said. "There's a lot of people that live in Ukee that came from Tofino. You know why? It's because they don't want that B.S. beside them."

Cole doubted the new restrictions would have a significant impact on the community's long-term housing needs, but Noel suggested that is not the bylaw's only goal.

"I'm not thinking that this is going to be the cure for any long-term housing, but I do believe that this ensures the quaintness of our community," he said.

He suggested Ucluelet's housing market is fast becoming commercialized and buyers are arriving with a "sense of entitlement" to operate vacation rental businesses.

"It's becoming unmanageable," he said. "That is destroying our community. It's destroying neighbourhoods."

Coun. Jennifer Hoar said it's important to maintain the residential quality of neighbourhoods, adding that she lives in a multi-unit complex that does not allow nightly rentals, but is located next to one.

"I live right behind an Airbnb and I can't even tell you how many Saturday nights I lie awake all night because they're partying," she said.

She said she has spoken to the property's owner and while signs have been put up urging guests to respect the neighbourhood, little change has occurred.

"My issue is we want a community," Hoar said. "All those people that have moved here, away from places like up the road in Tofino that is becoming a community of short term rentals. We don't want a community of short term rentals. We want a community of people who choose to live here, raise families here."

She added she has heard from locals who are being forced to move out of their long-term housing to make way for more guest suites.

"I have heard from a lot of people and

I work with a lot of people who can't afford to live here, who have lost their long-term housing, because the house goes up for sale and it currently has a secondary suite that's easily convertible to a B and B. So, the long-term suite goes bye bye when the house flips... We need to draw a line in the sand. We need to do something because people are losing the ability to live here," she said.

"I agree that there are some things (in the bylaw) that could be tweaked, but there are so many things that are right in this that it outweighs the things that need a little tweaking."

Coun. Lara Kemps said bed and breakfasts have changed in the 50 years she's lived in Ucluelet.

"We saw the introduction to bed and breakfasts. It was slow, but it is really ramping up. I think this is a really heavy stance that we're sitting up here doing, but I know this is the first step," she said, adding the new bylaw could add to the community's long-term housing stock.

"There are homes, and I know a few, that have been flipped and as Coun. Hoar said, their suites have been turned into bed and breakfasts... I didn't live here for over 50 years to see what's happening. I don't want to live beside a bed and breakfast."

Cole suggested tourists are not the sole providers of late night noise, explaining that she lives next to a residential apartment building and experiences similar sleep barriers as Hoar.

"I can be awake every night of the week if I wanted to, between domestics and stuff that's going on next door to me. So, I think we need to take that out of it because that can happen on any street next to any neighbour next to any zone," she said, reiterating her desire for taking "baby steps" rather than passing all the new restrictions at once.

"It's a lot easier to do if we just do a little bit and then let the next (council) do the next little bit, as opposed to doing this and then them taking it back because now we've opened a can of worms... It's always harder to go back."

Cole made a motion to move the bylaw conversation to a November council meeting for consideration, so the points of contention could be further reviewed.

"There are still people that, by making a blanket decision, we may impact their future and their livelihood. People who have been here for decades, generations of people, we may actually, down the road, adversely affect them," she said. "There's got to be some middle ground."

Noel suggested pushing the bylaw's consideration to a future meeting could delay the process into the New Year as another public hearing would likely be needed if major amendments were made.

Cole expressed confidence that the bylaw would not pass, challenging Noel to "call the question then, we're going to defeat it," and reiterating her opposition to restricting primary entrances to suites.

"That is the whole structure of someone's home and livelihood and how they exist in their own residence and we've talked many times about how, especially during COVID, we realized it's important to thrive and love and live in your home," she said.

Noel reiterated that anyone currently operating a bed and breakfast would not be affected as their use would be grandfathered in.

Kemps suggested guest suites could still have exterior doors, as long as they were not used as a primary entrance.

"You're not building a hotel here, you're building a bed and breakfast," Kemps said, adding that council "has to start somewhere."

"You have to firmly put your feet on the ground and say, 'What do we want in the community?'"

Noel added that anyone wanting to operate a more robust bed and breakfast than the new bylaw allows, could submit an application to the district, which would give neighbours an opportunity to provide input.

"You rezone your property in order to use it for what you want to use it for with notification of your neighbours. That is not the process right now," he said.

"The whole purpose of this is that there needs to be more input from those neighbours that are affected because not everybody signed up to have those beside it... Buying a house in R1 zoning to go blasting a three-unit motel is not what neighbourhoods need."

Cole suggested the new process would make it more difficult for people to operate bed and breakfasts.

"As opposed to just being able to get their permit, they're going to have to apply for a change and their neighbours are going to have to agree and they're going to have to pay for it," she said.

When the time came to vote, Noel, Kemps and Hoar voted against postponing the decision and in favour of adopting the bylaw, outnumbering Cole and McEwen who both voted in favour of postponing and against adopting.