

Dear Village of Empire,

Thank you for reading this letter. I have been doing some reading on the Village website and following the story of the STR ordinance and some thoughts on the subject. I hope you'll humor my perspective; I'll try to keep it as brief and coherent as I can:

My parents have been a part of Empire for over 20 years now, and since then my wife and children have been here every year and in every season. In an effort to be closer and spend some time with family, my wife and I have been looking for a house here for the last 3-4 years, and finally bought the old Deering house on Front st. last August.

Knowing (as we did at the time) that Empire was STR friendly, we made the decision to purchase here based on our ability to help bridge some of our costs through the STR mechanism. Also, when we first got our home in August, it was in need of repairs and updating, and we undertook some renovations. We wanted to do that first because it seemed it might be difficult to rent at all if it weren't cleaned up a bit, and it was easier to do before we moved in our things. That is to say we make two significant investments based on the information we knew at the time we bought.

I think one thing that's important to note- most of the investment we have put into our home has gone right back into Empire and Leelanau county: Bob's HVAC, Northern Spark Electrical, Bayside Plumbing, Griff's Carpentry/remodeling, Dan Braidy Paint and Drywall, JD's Siding and Exteriors, as well as our flooring contractor, Jade. In this way, there has already been some real benefit to the area, not just with respect to tourism-related businesses. I would bet this is true of many folks in the area who operate STR's.

Our neighbors are universally kind and interested in us increasing the quality and value of a neighborhood house. I haven't heard any dissent in our undertaking in the community. On the contrary, many on my street have part time STR's and have had nothing but good experiences with the process.

I do have a few suggestions on the STR ordinance. First, I think we have to base the solution for Village of Empire on data collected from the Village of Empire. We shouldn't be extrapolating from other communities and infer that Empire needs similar rules. As previously stated by others, we actually have good data from Empire over the course of several years of operating STR's and there has been no pattern of problems identified. Second, I think we have to consider: Empire *is special*. It's a family-style community that people come to in order to relax by the beach and enjoy. This is not a "beer cans on the front yard" type of place. People who want to engage in that type of behavior would rent elsewhere. It would be a bit like wearing a drinking helmet to the symphony – you either chose the wrong hat or the wrong concert!

Here are a few other issues I see just based on the letters I have read on the website:

- There is an issue with grandfathering. Several owners intend to operate a STR based on the reality when they bought or built in Empire, and they're worried this will be taken away. This can create enormous financial harm to owners in the Village. In this way, we would be creating a problem to solve one we haven't identified actually exists. My suggestion here would be if a cap is implemented, be gentle with this group in the grey area who haven't started renting yet but can at least prove they had intention to do so.

- I would ask that you grandfather my house in, and given that we are already up and running we may be in compliance based on the language I see you have proposed. Even so, I don't want to see my neighbors harmed by this ordinance, and it is clear from what I have read that the committee's intentions are positive, and only to maintain the high quality of life in Empire. I support that goal, and think that if an ordinance is created it should be carefully constructed to achieve that.
- There is not complete data (at least that I can find) about who is operating and intending to operate a STR in Empire. In order to make a good decision on how to structure a STR ordinance, you will need these data first.
- I don't think the flow of information has been as transparent as it could have been. The implementation of an ordinance is a major change to Village home owners' rights to use their property, and I only found out about it as I was searching the website for Village of Empire. I haven't seen any notices or mailers. I worry that there are others who would be affected by this who have incomplete information about the situation.
- I (and potentially others) do not understand how the number of STR's in the cap will be chosen. My apologies if this has been answered, but it is perhaps the most important point in the ordinance and cannot be based on anything other than empirical data as it has a chance to do harm to those who have bought homes here in Empire. One suggestion would be this: err on the side of being more inclusive of STR's if you get started with an ordinance. You can always adjust the proportion of STR's as houses change hands or new houses are built.
- If and when the ordinance is created, please ensure realtors in the area are unequivocally educated on this, and info about the ordinance is included in listings and discussions with new buyers/builders. Those who will invest in Empire in the future should have full transparency about what they are able and not able to do.
- I think a STR ordinance may cool property values in the area, which would affect everybody in the Village, not just STR owners.

Thanks for reading my letter. Please reach out with any questions. Picture of beer helmet below for reference.

Can't wait for summer. See you all at Joes-

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