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Subject: Empire STR Committee
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Good afternoon,

I'm writing in regards to the STR committee and their work towards creating ordinances around those rentals.

My wife and I recently finished building a cottage in Empire, and we hope it will be our family vacation home for generations. We fell in love with Empire after staying in a STR on Erie Street, and that led to us building our own place in the New Neighborhood. When I mentioned that to our STR host, he replied that we are at least the third family to stay in his place and then build in Empire.

My wife and I are middle-class. She is an editor and I am a public school teacher. Building a cottage was a financial stretch, and we specifically chose to build in the New Neighborhood partly because we knew city ordinances and the PUD did not forbid STR. We were counting on the opportunity to rent our family cottage just a few weeks each year to create a financial cushion.

Now I see that the city council has formed a committee exploring restrictions on STRs. I've read the materials, but I am not sure what problem the committee is trying to solve. Based on the 2020 STR report, which was thorough and transparent, STRs don't seem to be causing any issues in Empire. In fact they seem to be essential to the survival of small, local businesses.

Some voices have spoken about the problems of limited housing stock, housing affordability, an aging population, noise, trash, and traffic, but no one has shown that STRs are causing those problems in Empire. I have also heard the message that residents want to build community and to be friendly with neighbors. I want that too, but the desire to be friendly does not seem solid grounds on which to limit an entire community's property rights.

I hope that as the committee and council considers STR policy, they will identify the problem and draft fair regulations that will resolve that problem without unduly infringing on property rights. I also hope the council recognizes the significant difference between families like ours—which hope to occasionally use our cottage as an STR to help us afford the place—and homes that are almost exclusively used as STRs.

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Take care,
Carl Spina