



Gordon Head Residents' Association spokesperson Donald Gunn says residents never wanted a conflict between homeowners and students when it comes to unrelated occupancy limits. (Gordon Head Residents' Association/Facebook)

# Unrelated occupancy limits creating divisions in Saanich

Gordon Head Residents' Association wants to see conditions to hold landlords accountable

DEVON BIDAL / Feb. 21, 2020 12:00 p.m. / [LOCAL NEWS](#) / [NEWS](#)

Members of the Gordon Head Residents' Association (GHRA) are concerned that the proposed bylaw amendment to increase Saanich's unrelated occupancy limits has become unnecessarily divisive.

The issue of the number of unrelated people permitted to live in a home has been a controversial topic in the District since it was brought to council in early 2019.

"It's not the number [of occupants] that we're concerned about, it's the landlords," said Donald Gunn, treasurer of the GHRA.

Speaking on behalf of the GHRA, Gunn explained that residents were originally concerned about landlords who treat their rental properties like a business and create unsafe living conditions for individuals who rent in the area.

Gunn noted that many landlords who rent to more than four individuals still charge per bedroom rather than splitting the total rent. This model “drives families out of the rental market,” he said.

Gunn feels that requiring a business licence and rezoning the properties would hold landlords more accountable and help with bylaw enforcement.

Coun. Zac de Vries, who has been vocal about supporting the proposed increase to the unrelated occupancy limits, doesn't feel rezoning the properties would be appropriate but agreed that more responsibility could be put on landlords through licensing.

“It would be a wise idea” for landlords who rent out an entire dwelling to be required to have a business licence, de Vries said. He noted that when part of a dwelling is rented, the fees are supplemental, but when the entire home is rented out, it becomes a source of income.

Council has asked municipal staff to report back with options for regulating long-term rentals in an effort to ensure that the safety and upkeep standards are met by landlords, de Vries said.

In January, council voted to send the proposed increase from four to six occupants to a public hearing which de Vries feels will likely be set for a Saturday in March. A weekend date will

permit more people to attend and will allow adequate time for all to be heard, he explained.

Based on past discussions, Gunn predicts that the bylaw amendment will pass no matter what happens at the public hearing. However, he said it won't make a difference; the rentals will still be run like a business and there will still be homes with eight or more residents, he explained.

Gunn feels that there hasn't been enough consultation and that students – who he emphasized are part of the community – have been put in the middle. Residents “never wanted this conflict,” but rather hoped for a dialogue between homeowners, council, landlords, and the individuals who rent in Saanich, he said, but the issue was turned into a neighbours-versus-students conflict with people taking sides.

De Vries is hopeful residents will come out to the public hearing to voice their opinions. He emphasized that residents are welcome to reach out to council beforehand to ask questions.

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