

## Saanich limit on roommates in homes unfair: students

Richard Watts / Times Colonist

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Saanich Mayor Fred Haynes.  
Photograph By ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

The UVic Student Society wants to work with Saanich council to boost the number of non-related people allowed to share a single home in the district, now limited to four.

Jonathan Granirer, director of outreach and university relations for the University of Victoria Student Society, said that limit is unfair to students at a time when housing is in chronically short supply.

"I myself have lived in a house with nine roommates," said Granirer. "It's not because we want to live with so many [people]. It's because we are in the middle of a housing crisis and we have to live somewhere."

This month, the UVic Student Society voted to approach Saanich council to speak against the bylaw. Council is already awaiting a report from district bureaucrats on the issue that's expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Oak Bay limits home occupants to one family and two boarders. Esquimalt allows one family, which can include no more than four unrelated people.

While Victoria limits home occupants to one family, it defines a family as "one person or a group of persons who through marriage, blood relationship or other circumstances normally live together."

Early this year, seven women studying at UVic and rooming together found themselves facing eviction notices when Saanich bylaw officers took action.

Three were forced to move out, even though their rented home had seven bedrooms.

The bylaw, which is enforced on a complaint basis, has limited the number of unrelated people sharing a home to four since 1993, when the maximum was reduced from six.

Saanich Mayor Fred Haynes said nobody seems to know why the number went down, but added neighbourhood feelings have to be taken into account.

He said people become upset when a single home attracts large numbers of parked vehicles, noise and unkempt premises.

“Neighbourhoods are concerned about the impacts on the qualities of their lives,” Haynes said.

He added, however, that Saanich has other bylaws to govern problems such as parking, noise and unkempt premises and might not need to restrict the number of roommates in a single home.

“We’re talking about behaviour,” Haynes said. “There might be other approaches to better manage behaviour.”

While Haynes acknowledged the housing crisis, he said Saanich is taking steps to ease the crunch. The district recently agreed to allow construction of detached garden suites on single-family lots and is now considering whether to allow both secondary suites and garden suites on one lot.

Saanich has worked closely with UVic on its plans to build new housing on campus for 783 students, expected by 2023, he said. And it’s continuing discussions with the university and Camosun College in hopes of seeing more on-campus student housing.

Haynes said he welcomes the input of the UVic Student Society as Saanich debates the issue of allowing more than four unrelated residents in a home.

He said the student society could even play a role in addressing issues such as parking, party noise and unsightly premises that annoy neighbours.

“What can they do to bring some relief to those neighbourhood concerns?” Haynes said. “It’s often in the hands of the residents of those houses.”

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