

Saanich council supports looking at options to amend rental-restriction bylaw

[Cindy E. Harnett](#) / Times Colonist

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Saanich Mayor Fred Haynes
Photograph By ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

UPDATE: On Monday night, Saanich council unanimously supported a recommendation from Mayor Fred Haynes and Coun. Zac de Vries asking municipal staff to look at options to amend a zoning bylaw to increase the number of unrelated people who can live in a single dwelling.

[An updated story is here.](#)

Saanich Mayor Fred Haynes wants municipal staff to look at options to amend a zoning bylaw that would increase the number of unrelated people who can live in a single dwelling. The existing limit is four.

The recommendation comes on the heels of an uproar about seven University of Victoria students evicted from a Saanich home, linked in part to a bylaw that limits the number of unrelated people who can live together under one roof.

Coun. Zac de Vries and Haynes are asking council to support a recommendation for staff to report on options to change the bylaw.

The students have since found other, albeit in some cases more expensive, housing.

“We are in the middle of a housing crisis,” Haynes and de Vries say in a letter to council.

“Before and after the election, residents, business operators, and councillors have said we need to take action to address the affordability crisis in Saanich,” the letter says. “A small and immediate action would be to reconsider the occupancy limits of unrelated residents.”

Section 5.20 of the zoning bylaw limits the number of unrelated persons who can live together.

The 1988 bylaw was updated in 1993 to include boarders — where a dwelling is occupied by two or more people unrelated by blood or marriage, the total number of persons unrelated by blood or marriage including boarders shall not exceed four.

“This section prevents groups, who often are low-income, from living together, which for them is necessary to survive in the current housing market,” de Vries and Haynes say in their letter.

Students, former foster children and seniors already living in these situations are vulnerable to eviction, they say.

But some Saanich residents support the existing bylaw, and have written letters to council that were included in an agenda package.

Linling Bie of Gordon Head said of houses rented by students in her neighbourhood: “What annoys me the most is the party, and noise, and drugs.”

It is not conducive to her raising two young girls, Bie said. She supports the current bylaw as it stands. She said the bylaw protects the community and neighbourhood. “We spend time building the relationship with our neighbours.”

Jeff St. Gelais said in a letter that seven students live in a house next door. The owners of the house live in another province.

Several problems have come up, including everything from poor behaviour to parking problems and it is only in having the bylaw that Gelais feels he has leverage to ask the tenants co-operate.

“Knowing the bylaw exists is a comfort should problems escalate,” said St. Gelais.

Michael Selman, who said he owns properties in Saanich, wrote to say updated housing bylaws are overdue. “Shame on Saanich for having these students evicted during a housing crisis,” Selman wrote.

Haynes and de Vries say limits on occupancy don’t effectively or directly address concerns about noise, parking and property maintenance — problems that can occur at residences where multiple people dwell.

There are more precise ways to address these concerns, they say.

“Saanich as a modern society needs to broaden the definition of family,” their letter says. The bylaw should be updated to include “different forms of family.”

“The goal of this report is to look at options where the zoning bylaw could be amended to be more inclusive of groups, including families, who have more than four persons who are unrelated by blood or marriage.”

ceharnett@timescolonist.com

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