



Council Chambers were packed during the Jan. 20 meeting while council and residents discussed the issue of unrelated occupancy limits. (Teale Phelps Bondaroff/Twitter)

Restrictions on unrelated occupants dominates Saanich council meeting

Saanich council sends issue of unrelated occupancy limits to public hearing

DEVON BIDAL / Jan. 22, 2020 8:00 a.m. / [LOCAL NEWS](#) / [NEWS](#)

Saanich council discussed unrelated occupant restrictions and little else during Monday night's meeting.

The agenda for the Jan. 20 meeting was jam-packed. Council was set to hear from many members of the public on a variety of issues – including the zoning bylaws that govern unrelated people who live together – before voting.



Zac de Vries - Saanich Councillor

@zac4saanich

We should not regulate who can and can't live together through the zoning code.

If people need roommates to afford to live here they should be allowed!

Limiting the number of unrelated residents whom can live in a dwelling, regardless of its size, is a form of exclusion!

55 12:24 AM - Jan 21, 2020

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After going over what Coun. Zac de Vries called “housekeeping,” council heard from the public on all agenda items.

Afterwards, the councillors only had time to address the contentious issue of unrelated occupant limits which was brought to council in early 2019 and the rest of the agenda was pushed to the next council meeting on Jan. 28.

In discussing unrelated occupants, staff presented council with several options for moving forward. De Vries motioned to have his fellow councillors consider treating related and unrelated occupants in the same way while still holding both groups to the same safety standards. The motion failed in a 6-3 vote.

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After discussing, council narrowed down the various courses of action and eventually voted to send the option of increasing the unrelated occupancy limit from four to six to a public hearing, explained Coun. Susan Brice.

While de Vries was pleased that the small increase in allowed occupants would move forward, he was “rather disappointed” that his motion failed as he sees the

differentiation between related and unrelated occupants as “discriminatory.”

He noted that those against the idea blamed parking, excess garbage and noise issues – but de Vries feels these “genuine issues” can be addressed through other bylaws and enforcement rather than by blaming low-income residents who need roommates.

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He also pointed out that unrelated people don’t inherently disturb their neighbours. He feels the concerns were “misassigned” to residents living with roommates.

De Vries noted that the roommate restrictions disproportionately affect vulnerable communities and restrict people from certain neighbourhoods. He feels that biases about unrelated occupants cohabitating are “rooted in class values from the 1970s” but can be changed by spreading awareness of the housing issues.

“People don’t have a choice – who are we to regulate who they can and cannot live with?” he said.

De Vries also pointed out that council has acknowledged the region’s housing crisis, so he’s confused why empty bedrooms aren’t allowed to be filled.

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“There’s housing hiding in plain sight,” he said.

Brice noted that the issues residents have with unrelated occupancy limits aren't new or unique to Saanich and that while some councillors may have strong opinions on the issue, all "must go to a public hearing with an open mind." She can see validity in the points from both sides

De Vries feels confident that his peers will agree to increase the limit of unrelated occupants from four to six following the public hearing, but wants to continue to address Saanich's housing issues including unrelated occupant limits more broadly in the future.

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