

Tofino Ratepayers Association



August 11, 2024

Hello Ratepayers,

How is staff housing in Tofino working for you? For your business?..... For your employees? How is it working for your neighbourhood? And how is it working for people who come here for a job? For the “season”? Is it helping or working against people who would like to live here full time? Folks who want a home.

For a small ‘tourist’ town we have a variety of housing needs, seasonal staff accommodation being one.

Seems to me Tofino has never had an effective position, or policy on “staff housing”. Let alone a plan. Millions are spent annually to promote Tofino worldwide....to attract the tourists, but what is done to house the majority of young workers necessary to keep the thing going....

If you own or operate one of the larger resorts, you likely have enough real estate to construct and house, in some fashion, your own staff. And many do, to some extent.

If you operate a smaller business, if you hire seasonally... good luck...eh!

Some employees are likely living in a parked Winnebago, trailer or van or unorganized camping situation. Just yesterday, I spoke to a young woman waitressing. She said many are living in vans or sleeping in cars. We all know this. Someone offered her and her boyfriend a place to park on private property for \$1000 per month. Some seasonal workers do, but many others are camping rough in the bush with a pit toilet. Good thing we got that sewage treatment up and going, eh! Doesn’t sound world class to me.

Have you noticed any of this? If you have not you need to get out more. They are parked just about everywhere in Tofino. Some in the so-called Temporary Use Zoned properties, but many are just parked on Residentially Zoned property, virtually everywhere in Tofino. Do I exaggerate?

My own observations are that quite a few properties in Tofino have a few, sometimes 3, 4, or more “homes on wheels” parked behind a hedge row, or around the bend in a driveway, sometimes in plain sight. Does the Zoning Bylaw permit this? My understanding is that an occupied, residentially zoned lot is allowed to store one such “motorhome” per lot to be parked (not lived in) for the convenience of the homeowner. Please correct me....Is my understanding outdated? Perhaps the bylaws have evolved without my knowledge? For small business owners and even some of the larger operations, these forms of “housing” and places of occupation are essential. But what choice do many employers have? Seriously. There are few, to no, options. Even the new employee of the Bank told me how “lucky he was” to get a travel trailer, parked behind someone’s home, to live in. Phew! What a place

But we also have to recognize that those who rent out such “accommodations” are playing fast and loose with the tax system and Tofino allows this. Rental trailers or motorhomes here and there, don’t show up as assessed value on property tax bills, unlike that granny suite you may be renting out. Yes, the suite Tofino wants you to rent out monthly rather than Vacation Rental it. The suite that

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requires you to pay income tax on your earnings, and capital gains tax if you sell. So, it is taxes for certain folk and for others? What? This creates a great incentive to game the system. So, people do. So, some pay more tax because others pay... less. Is that helping home ownership.?

The larger “Temporary Use Permit’ (TUP) properties that allow for camping/living operations, may be dodging a tax bullet as well. My conversations with Assessment BC would indicate they had no idea how intensely used certain facilities had become and “will look into it”. A few locations in particular, generating hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue, (How much?? You take a guess) were being assessed, not as “commercial” but “substantially residential” for property tax purposes and assessed at values equivalent to less than the average Tofino Home. That can’t be right.... Can’t be so.....Can it?

So, again, what we have here is a system that punishes certain folks who comply, and pay their taxes based on legitimate assessments and use categories, while others get a freer ride. So, when the tax bills come due, some of you folks are actually subsidizing others. And a lot of folks are still living in substandard, (let’s be honest) crappy circumstances.

Does any of this project the image of Tofino that we all want, or just some squalid rat’s nest where low level workers can be exploited.

Moving along, we come to those places, a house, a residentially zoned “home,” (usually Single Family Residential) which has been turned into a so-called “staff house”. Sometimes under a corporate name. It may see renovations to the original design to accommodate increased needs for greater numbers of workers and seasonal staff, greater than a normal home can provide. I get it. Businesses are taking responsibility for their own.... who can criticize that. But how does it affect neighbourhoods, socially? How is that property taxed?.....as a single-family zoned property???? Is that right? Is that fair? And....what does it do to property values in that neighbourhood. It actually drives them up! Making it more difficult for people looking for a home. I know real estate prices are driven by many factors, but.....

Corporations can expense a lot of things that residents can’t.....like property tax and mortgage interest, just to start. Corporations can outbid individuals and families looking for a home, because of what they can “right off”, making it more expensive for everyone in our neighbourhoods, as property values rise. Driving up both prices and assessments. Is that how we support Tofino as a place to live?

I understand businesses in the mid size range have no choice... They don’t own large acreages like most resort development. What else can they do? They don’t want their employees living in the streets... So good for them, eh! But I guess I am just a foolish old-timer, who thought R1 Zoning for Single Family Residential Use actually meant something like what it says....and not Boarding House.

Again, how does this support Tofino as a place to live for full time residents. Doesn’t Tofino have a shortage of homes, after a long period of no rezoning for housing, or do we even care anymore. As the economy marches inexorably “forward”, these trends will put more pressure on the “old stock”

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of Housing. As well, lax bylaw enforcement rewards violators and inflicts the costs on other taxpayers and would be home owners?

As you read this the DoT has undertaken a couple of recent initiatives regarding housing. One by the DoT's own Tofino Housing Corp is to examine the potential of certain small pieces of property, under title to the DoT. Some small park space, a few downtown parking lots. You may have heard, or read, of it. The most viable option is the piece of property beside the recycling center and the new sewage treatment facility. Near the back end of Industrial way. I believe it has the potential to become a location for staff housing. Are you ready for this, I suggest a proper mobile home park. Supported by smaller and mid size participating businesses who can buy into and secure a spot for their own staff. Perhaps in conjunction with, or under the auspices of, the Chamber of Commerce. Requiring substantially less capital to get off the ground, and meeting some of the most urgent needs for housing in the community. I won't go into detail on this except to encourage the THC/DOT to explore this possibility with the Chamber of Commerce and its members. Again, with the support from the businesses who would benefit from staff housing and can't afford a "Staff House" starting at \$1,500,000. It could function with little or no involvement or cost to the Taxpayer, with the commitment of business subscribers and actually contribute to municipal coffers, if the right deal was struck.

Tofino has a history of turning its nose up in the air at the mere suggestion of a proper mobile home park. We have one that functions quite well to provide low-cost housing at no expense to the public and pays its taxes. We could have another.... Vestiges of logging camps and "tackiness" say some. I say get real. Parts of Tofino have already become impromptu low-quality trailer and park anything "parks". Look around. Open your eyes. It is everywhere.

I will end where I started. We spend a lot on attracting and servicing tourists but Tofino has never had a serious plan, initiative or programme to house the seasonal folks who work here..... We need one and the rest of the community will be the better for it. This could be a small step in course correction.

What is most urgently needed is just a little courage.

Cheers Jack Gillie for the Tofino Ratepayers Association