



Citizens for a Better Flathead works to foster informed and active citizen participation in the decisions shaping the Flathead's future, and to champion the democratic principles, sustainable solutions, and shared vision necessary to keep the Flathead Special Forever. Since 1992 we have been working to secure policies that will keep the Flathead the place we love as it changes and grows.

Please take a few minutes to support greater protection for your neighborhood from the abuses occurring in Whitefish when an increasing number of property owners and management companies stretch the rules and offer short term rentals in neighborhoods where they aren't allowed. Act now for the Monday Dec. 20th Whitefish City Council hearing at 6pm. This is the first public hearing.



Speak up for these changes as an important next step to ensure that residentially zoned neighborhoods are for neighbors! [Click here and ask the city council to:](#) Please adopt these changes to the Whitefish Short term Rental Standards to better ensure that traditional Whitefish residential neighborhoods are not turned into tourist areas to the detriment of long-term residents. Please adopt these revised regulations to maximize the availability of affordable housing options by ensuring that long-term rentals are not being turned into short-term or midterm rentals, effectively part-time hotels, in my neighborhood.

According to the WF [planning office report](#) see pages 44, "These new proposed changes were initiated at City Council direction to further improve regulation and enforcement." They will help staff track legal short-term rentals and will help differentiate legal rentals from illegal ones that take needed long term housing stock from our traditional residential neighborhoods." Unfortunately, there is expected to be a strong turn out of management companies who property-owner companies who benefit financially by stretching the rules to oppose these changes so please take time to speak up by sending comments and show up at the hearing if you can.



Read below the excellent op ed that appeared in the 12/15/21 WF Pilot as to why these changes are needed now as a vital step forward to keeping Whitefish neighborhoods for neighbors. [Click here](#) for just the city council agenda and link to participate on-line in the meeting. [Click here to send comments](#) now.

Our residentially zoned neighborhoods are for neighbors

The Sustainable Tourism Management Planning Committee has recommended a change to the definition of short-term rentals, from less than 30 days to less than 90 days, to keep our residentially zoned areas as neighborhoods with neighbors. The ordinance goes before City Council on Monday, Dec. 20.

Our goal is for Council to pass these changes and ensure that traditional residential neighborhoods are not turned into tourist areas to the detriment of long-term residents.

We need to maximize the availability of affordable housing options by ensuring that long-term rentals are not being turned into short-term or midterm rentals, effectively part-time hotels.

When you can rent your home for 30 days, or even 60 days, that home is removed from the long-term rental market. This is already happening in our neighborhoods. I'm sure many of you have seen a home on your block get sold, then be occupied by the new owner a few months of the year and become a revolving door of monthly visitors or sit dark the remainder of the year. These types of investments in residential areas are gutting our neighborhoods. What will our community look like in the next five to 10 years?

Our neighborhoods should not become investment opportunities for folks who are looking to get income from their vacation home by operating a "part-time hotel" in a residential neighborhood. Whitefish already has designated zones that allow for that sort of thing WRR-1, WRR-2, WRB-1, WRB-3 zoning. If a buyer needs additional income to afford their part-time vacation home then they should purchase properties in those designated areas of our community. Owning a second home or vacation home is a luxury. Owning or renting a home in the community where you work should not be.

If the intention of residentially zoned neighborhoods is to in fact house residents, then there is no need to allow rentals shorter than 90 days.

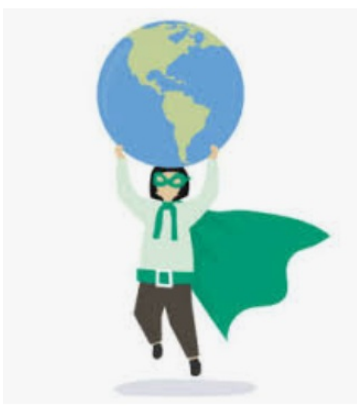
We have seen our community change rapidly over the past few years-visitation is at an all-time high and workforce housing at an all-time low. In the third quarter of 2021, there were 567 short-term vacation rental listings (this includes 30-day rentals) in Whitefish. In the first quarter, there were 408 listings. This is an almost 40% increase in the number of short-term rentals in six months. Imagine if those 160 homes could have gone to residents — things would look very different. Not only is the increase in short-term rentals taking beds from our workforce, but this ability to generate income from the property is also driving up purchase prices for homes. Housing prices in the Whitefish ZIP code have gone up 50.3% over the past year (the national average is a 19.2% increase). People see our community, with pristine rivers, abundant wilderness access and a lively downtown, as an investment opportunity.

If in the next year this ordinance prevents 10 homes in residentially zoned areas from selling to second homeowners who intend to rent their property on a monthly basis to generate income or subsidize their mortgage I call that a win.

That's beds for our neighbors in these residentially zoned areas. We need to maintain the local character, livability and integrity of our town for our residents, not provide investment opportunities for second homeowners (non-residents) that in turn drive up home prices and remove workforce housing from the rental market.

The fabric of our community is changing faster than we even realize. And we need to act before we lose more of our neighborhoods to short-term rentals. If you agree this definition change will help maintain the intention of residentially zoned areas — to be neighborhoods that house teachers, health care workers, small business owners, hospitality employees, city staff, and our workforce, then I encourage you to attend the meeting on Dec. 20 and share your stories of how short-term and midterm rentals are impacting your ability to purchase a home, find a long-term rental, adequately staff your business and live in a neighborhood with permanent resident neighbors.

Lauren Oscilowski is the chair of Sustainable Tourism Management Planning Committee and a Whitefish business owner.



Your support for our on-going work to keep the Flathead a Great Place is wonderful and always welcomed! [Click Here to Donate.](#)

Please share this email with your friends and neighbors and ask them to get involved.

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