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Public Hearing Comment on Proposed Short Term Rental Law

Village of Aurora

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The time has come for the Village to pass a short term rental law. The problem isn't that rentals are inherently bad but that the phenomenon has grown to a size that threatens the village rather than contributing to village life. People in Aurora have occasionally rented out their private homes for as long as I've lived here – which is 50 years this fall. For a long time we knew Aurora as an old-fashioned college town and professors rented their houses out in the summer. Relatives or renters were eager to be in the village, and in September permanent residents were back to fill those houses. Nobody needed to regulate that process.

But times change. When Wells' fortunes hit a rough spot in the '80's: they began to sell their housing stock and to sell their commercial businesses or close them in the winter – most notably the Inn. Aurora began to feel like one more declining upstate village with a shaky future. Help arrived in 2001 with money for Wells to refurbish things, bringing activity back to the village with new stores, a fine restaurant, and an inn that drew people from all over the globe. Ten rooms at the Inn turned out to be too few to guarantee the success of this new economic phase for the village. That's when short term rental - a solution and an opportunity - knocked at the doors of our private houses. Buying a property for short term rental not only provided the rooms needed for the Inn's wedding events and helped this growing village business, but made a lot of money.

But times change. We've watched and adapted for 20 years since then. There are now 30 houses in the village that are owned by non-residents and either are, or could be, short term rentals. Water usage confirms that more than 50% of our houses are empty in the winter. What do we do? The Village Board has tried pushing B&Bs because by NYS law they are occupied residences as well as short term rentals, but no legal bed and breakfast exists in Aurora. The Inns of Aurora has taken three residences, a vacant dormitory, and at least four smaller residences for their business. Various communal issues need attention – how to fill village boards, to find volunteers for the fire department, how to keep water and sewer rates in check, keep businesses open for locals in the winter. Are we

planning to be a seasonal vacation spot? If so, we'd better get going on affordable housing. Or are we planning to remain a year-round village.

What to do? The times seem to be changing again. And seem to favor the village. Both of our churches are more active and more oriented to the wider community. The Historical Society is flourishing with events and exhibits, as well as the ongoing Tuesday market. Aurorafest is back and better than ever. The Library and Opera House have many more winter events. The Inns now have 55 rooms and have cut way back on the number of large outdoor weddings requiring more rooms. It's time to bring short term rentals under control. Don't eliminate them, but don't allow them to take more of Aurora. We think we own our houses, but it's only for a while. Our housing stock really belongs to the village, to the entity that brings us together and reinvents itself constantly. Don't give it away, please pass this law.