



TO: Planning Commission members, City of Calistoga

FROM: John Green, 1305 South Oak St., Calistoga

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I offer, herewith, some observations re the idea that Calistoga might need to relax its regulations that govern the operation of Bed & Breakfast places. I will make no attempt to answer the broad question at hand but, rather, I will offer some food for thought as you approach the task ahead of you:

-- What is the standard size for B&Bs in California? It seems to me, as a layman, that a facility with more than six rooms would constitute a hotel or an inn rather than a B&B. Anything above that number would likely destroy the intimate, staying-in-somebody's-home concept that has made B&Bs popular across the country. If you decide that more than six units might be desirable, you perhaps should allow the larger facilities only in specially-designated zones close to the city's commercial core.

-- On its face, the idea that a B&B could operate without on-site, around-the-clock supervision seems absurd. I can't understand why any B&B owner would want to do this even if it were allowed. It would seem to be asking for trouble -- for the owner, for the guests, and for the neighborhood. No business can operate properly and efficiently without supervision.

-- I understand that the local lodging business is down from previous months and years because of the ailing economy. If this is true, do we know that the B&B market in Calistoga will support more units? Without a strong local market, another issue arises for the operators themselves: Although adding more units might generate more total TOT revenue for the city -- assuming there is a need for more units -- it could also hurt individual owners, whose occupancy levels might drop because of increased competition. The claim that more units are needed should be investigated before the city jumps into changing the regulations. More is not necessarily better for the community, nor is it a guarantee of more income for the city as a whole or for individual operators.

These and other unanswered questions need to be addressed before we can know whether any changes are appropriate. Such as: What are other communities doing? The chamber letter says others are relaxing their regulations but, curiously, the staff report does not address this point. Is it true? If it is, what communities are we talking about -- others in the California Wine Country, or faraway locations that might have no bearing on what Calistoga is or isn't doing?

Finally, it seems to me that the process behind this proposal has been flawed because the group that launched it didn't adequately represent the whole of Calistoga. Any committee studying this matter, or any similar matter with potentially wide-ranging ramifications, should be broad-based, representing the full spectrum of citizenry. That would mean a committee composed of business representatives, city government representatives and interested citizens unaffiliated with local commerce.

In short: There is more at stake here than just the question of whether Calistoga needs more B&B units to raise TOT revenues. There is also the issue that affects every person who resides here: livability.