

From: [Kate Haug](#)
To: [Mary Gourley](#); camille@sonomawest.com
Cc: [Kari Svanstrom](#); [Fernandez, Evert](#)
Subject: Public Comment _ 1_19_21 Agenda Item #8
Date: Saturday, January 16, 2021 10:02:16 AM

January 16, 2021

Dear Council Members,

I am writing in regards to Agenda Item #8, an endorsement for West County Transient Occupancy Tax Measure (March 2021 Election), which would increase the TOT by 4%.

I am writing to oppose this Measure as it does not address any of the long-term, root causes of decreasing school enrollment and need for affordable housing.

The West County schools are facing a budget deficit because of declining enrollment. This is because housing costs are high and much of the housing stock has been converted to vacation rentals. When housing is converted to vacation rentals, it inflates both purchase and rental prices because people pay more for a nightly vacation rental than they pay for a yearly, long-term rental. Housing prices become based on mortgages which can be paid through higher, vacation rental income.

This measure will make West County dependent on TOT from vacation rentals. We have just seen the conversion of the Sebastopol Inn's 31 hotel rooms into a County run housing facility. If we are reliant on TOT, it seems that we should not convert valuable hotel rooms into housing.

With this conversion, are we to see an increase of 31 AirBnbs to make up the loss? And if so, what does that do to our local housing stock? What does that imply for rental and purchase prices in our local market?

In addition, I believe that many in the local hotel operators are against this tax as they feel it will make their hotel rooms less desirable. It might be prudent to get input from the local individuals who manage and operate West County hotels and inns to see if they feel this Tax Measure will hurt or help their businesses.

I was a huge supporter of Prop. 15 which actually helped to equalize the tax burden between commercial and residential real estate, been a consistent source of funding and would have brought \$180,000,000 into the Sonoma County schools. As we know, we did not pass Prop. 15.

I am a supporter of public education but this Measure is ill conceived and does not address the long-term issues of affordability and on-going school funding.

If we do not address the affordability issue, teachers, school staff and other members of our educational community will not be able to afford to live here.

It should be noted that the annual operating budget of \$1,200,000 for the County run housing facility in Sebastopol (40 residents @ \$2500 per month) is close to the deficit amount that the West County Union school district is facing. The district serves 1700 students. The housing facility will serve 30-45 people.

I am voting no against this Measure as it is a stop-gap, short-term fix that will only exacerbate our current housing crisis and make us more dependent on vacation rentals, which are one of the causes of the current housing crisis.

I urge you to get input from local hotel and inn operators and to think carefully about the long-term implications of this Tax Measure before giving it unilateral support.

Best wishes,
Kate Haug
Sebastopol