

**Letters to the Pine Cone Editor**  
**December 2016**

**Why Sam Farr Is Wrong About Short-Term Rentals**

Dear Editor,

Sam Farr has recently spoken out against short-term rentals. We think he is wrong on this one.

Farr says that campgrounds and RV sites are the answer to visitors who cannot afford costly hotel stays in Big Sur. This elitist approach opposes what the Coastal Act calls for and what we think Monterey County residents want. The Coastal Act says that the coast is for all people, not just those who are lucky enough to own property on the coast (as Farr does) or who can afford luxury hotels. Short-term rentals are a “middle ground.”

Farr says the Big Sur Local Coastal Plan was never intended to allow short-term rentals, but that isn't what the LCP says. The purpose of the LCP was to prevent development, such as large hotels, not to prevent home sharing in already existing structures. Farr runs a wedding venue on the Big Sur coast, hosting rather large events in this remote area. Where do many of the guests at the events on his property stay? In vacation rentals! Short-term rentals are one way to accommodate visitors by using current structures for an ever-growing visiting public. Accordingly, the Coastal Commission recently ordered the county to create a short-term rental ordinance. The Monterey County Vacation Rental Alliance agrees! MCVRA does not, however, support permitting events in residential areas, because large events, not family visits, cause inevitable problems.

MCVRA agrees with Farr's call for more affordable housing. However, inflation and property values have priced coastal homes out of the “affordable” housing inventory long ago. MCVRA urges the County to work with employers to permit and construct affordable housing, rather than passing the buck on to local homeowners whose homes will never provide workforce housing.

Short-term rentals allow younger and less wealthy folks to continue living in Big Sur as landowners, as they provide a livelihood. Additionally, the rentals allow homeowners the use of their homes some of the time, while renting them out when vacant. “Luxury taxes” and other proposals to make such rentals impossible head in exactly the wrong direction.

Richard Matthews

Monterey County Vacation Rental Alliance

**'He has his'**

Dear Editor,

Outgoing Rep. Sam Farr, like most liberals, wants to dictate to homeowners what they can and cannot do with their property. He wants to deprive those fortunate enough to have two homes of the Constitutional right to short-term rent them out in Big Sur. He even wants to fine those who don't occupy their homes full-time!

He apparently has no regard for the undocumented families who survive on cleaning these homes for the next renter. Is he a racist? No, he's a liberal who when he doesn't like something, wants to ban it!

Seems to me he's had two residences during his 20 years in Congress. But, that's okay; he has his!

Gregory D. Lee, Pebble Beach

## Editorial by the Pine Cone Editor

### Carmel Pine Cone Editorial - Short-term rentals: Let the people decide

IT WAS Sam Farr, in his recent comments to the county planning commission, who focused our attention on what's really going on with short term rentals.

While he was in office, the outgoing congressman was a member of the far left faction of the Democratic Party, and now he seems to be in the mood to bring his "regulate everything" philosophy to local politics.

"I don't think we should have short-term rentals in any community in this county," Farr said. And then he went on to propose that a penalty be imposed on anybody who lets a home sit empty — presumably referring to all those people who live in Silicon Valley or Fresno or Texas and only use their second homes in Carmel or Pebble Beach a few weeks a year. They may have the constitutional right to decide when and how to use their own property, but if owners of second homes let a perfectly good home sit empty most of the time, it's certainly true that the effect is to reduce the housing supply for other full-time residents and would-be residents. And that, according to Farr, is something the second home owners should be forced to alleviate by paying a fee.

Farr does have a point — but only because the upscale communities of Monterey County refuse to grow. Since almost no new houses and apartments are being built in these parts, even as more and more people want to live here, not only is it very difficult to find a place to live, prices for the few houses that exist go through the roof. But is that a bad thing? Not if you already own one. In other words, while the empty-second-home phenomenon Farr decried is certainly bad for some people, it's very good for others. And so it is with the entire short-term rental issue.

By now, the pros and cons of short-term rentals are well known. Homeowners who rent out a spare bedroom or an entire house to visitors get extra income, which helps them pay their mortgage, property taxes, or college tuition for their kids. Meanwhile, the people on vacation get access to real neighborhoods, have more affordable options than hotels, and can choose accommodations that are ideal for groups and families. Also, the entire short-term rental process can generate lots of new taxes.

On the other side, short-term rentals can have very undesirable impacts on neighborhoods — and not just noise and parking congestion. Having a new group of strangers 50 feet away from you every other weekend can be very discomfiting, and if there's one thing nobody wants to lose when they're at home, it's their peace of mind.

Both sides have valid points, and normally we would recommend that a dispute such as this one be tossed into the democratic process, to be decided by the people's representatives in their various city halls and county buildings, or even in Sacramento. But in this case, the emotions and the passions are too high. Proponents of short-term rentals definitely don't want anybody telling them what to do with their own properties, and the people who don't want short-term rentals next door are just as adamant. It will take a very long time and cause a lot of bad will before the issue comes close to being decided by elected and appointed officials.

Instead, we think this is a classic case of something that should be decided by a referendum at the ballot box. Short-term rentals come in all shapes and sizes, and every community is different, so crafting an appropriate series of options and putting them on the ballot would be complex. But it still should be done, and the sooner the better.