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Coastal agency backs short term rentals

By CHRIS COUNTS

SUGGESTING THAT it would oppose an outright ban on short term rentals in coastal Monterey County, the California Coastal Commission recommended this week that the county allow rentals in its coastal zone, which includes Big Sur, Carmel Highlands and Carmel.

In a letter to the county dated June 23, the coastal commission's Central Coast District Director Susan Craig said the California Coastal Act "places a higher priority on the provision of visitor-serving uses, particularly overnight accommodations, over private uses." She also noted that short term rentals "offer low-cost overnight opportunities, especially for families and large groups."

Yet Craig conceded the Coastal Act also protects "public views, agricultural lands, environmentally sensitive habitat areas, and streams and wetlands." As a result, "the allowance for visitor overnight accommodations must be balanced with the act's other requirements." She also said short term rentals impact communities, creating noise and traffic.

The coastal commission recommends that instead of banning short term rentals in the coastal zone, the county should develop regulations that address the concerns locals have.

Craig pointed to Santa Cruz and San Luis Obispo counties as places where ordinances permitting short term rentals have been successful. Instead of prohibiting the business, "these communities instead were able to find a balanced middle ground that helps to ensure that vacation rentals are regulated" — and "limited as necessary to avoid oversaturation of such rentals in any one neighborhood or locale."

The coastal commission has traditionally been first and foremost a champion of environmental resources, such as beaches and water quality, but has apparently refocused its efforts on making the coast more accessible to people — including those who live in the inland parts of the state.

In December, William and Duncan Lewis of Pebble Beach sued the county over rules that prohibit them from renting their house on a short term basis.