

Kitchens for B&Bs?

Local Trust Committee Launches Bylaw Review

Should Denman Island's regulations for visitor accommodation be changed? What are the pros and cons of allowing our Bread and Breakfast establishments to provide kitchens for guests?

The Denman Island Local Trust Committee (LTC) has launched a project to consider these questions, after several years of consistent urging to do so from many B&B owners and other interested Islanders.

Here is a bit of background information to inform the public debate:

Current Regulations on Visitor Accommodation

The regulations as they stand say that you are allowed to provide accommodation for paying guests in your home (but not in a separate building) as long as you, or someone, is living there. You can have up to three bedrooms with up to two beds each. This is outlined in the Denman Land Use Bylaw (LUB), subsections 2.4.2, 2.4.15, 2.4.16, & 2.4.17.

Kitchen facilities in visitor accommodation are not allowed. Historically, reasons given for this include the fact that once these units have kitchens it is hard to differentiate them from apartments, and then we run into complications because we have limits on the number of dwelling units per property; and partly because our community has consistently expressed a wish that economic activity not compromise our natural environment nor the "privacy, peace and quiet beauty that island living permit." (from our Official Community Plan – see below).

Why consider changing this?

Here's a scenario we keep hearing about: Island visitors, happily ensconced in their B&B, have limited or no options for dinner. Over the years we've seen that Denman does not offer a sufficient range of cafes and restaurants to consistently provide for visitor needs. Also we (by which I mean the Denman LTC, as well as other community organizations) have been hearing that in a changing market, B&B guests increasingly want kitchen facilities. Being able to offer this will help B&B providers sustain a successful business.

The Land Use Bylaw allows B&B providers to cook and serve meals to guests, but the Public Health Act requires a commercial kitchen, an approved water system, and a higher level of septic system for this, which makes it too onerous for many B&B operators.

Allowing kitchen facilities could be considered a low-impact way to ease these problems and to support our local economy.

What are the guiding principles for contemplating changing these regulations?

The community's wishes and values are expressed in our Official Community Plan (OCP), a document that has been produced, and regularly revised, based on in-depth community discussions. Our bylaws need to be guided by this document, taking into account changing conditions and new information as it arises.

Here are highlights of that document's directions on tourism and guest accommodation:

- Denman's regulations should "provide for a range of economic activities that respect the natural environment and the character of the human community." (page 17)
- Tourist accommodation should be provided primarily in home-based guest accommodation. (page 58, policy 14)
- Tourism should "be managed in a way that respects our community's foremost function as a home for its residents." (page 15, Guiding Policy 11)
- Economic activities should not threaten "the privacy, peace and quiet beauty that island living permits." (page 15, Guiding Policy 8)
- Economic activity should be small-scale and avoid negative impacts of traffic, noise and artificial light. (page 57, Guiding Policy 2 & 3)

Getting involved in the review

There will be at least one public meeting specifically to get community feedback on this issue; watch local media for more info. Also, you are welcome to attend any Local Trust Committee meeting and speak about this (or any other) topic, and/or to make your thoughts known via email.

If you want to get more informed (which increases your ability to make convincing arguments, and to understand differing points of view) have a look at our Community Plan and Land Use Bylaw, which are on our website and in the Denman library. Previous articles I've written on this topic (in 2012) are on the website, filed under Trustee Corner, 2011 – 2014 term, on the website.

You may also find it interesting to read a report commissioned by DenmanWORKS!, our local economic enhancement initiative, about Denman visitors. You'll need to contact DenmanWORKS! to get ahold of this (250-335-3170/denmanresource@gmail.com).

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