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Chamber advocates for exemptions to short-term rental laws

VERNON—The Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce believes new legislation intended to bolster long-term rental availability could pose serious risks to short-term rental resorts that drive North Okanagan tourism.

Set to take effect in May, the provincial [legislation](#) is focused on returning short-term rentals to the long-term market by establishing province wide rules and restrictions on short-term housing including the enforcement and fines for violators. A Greater Vernon Chamber task force has uncovered potential risks to local businesses and made recommendations that would mitigate the economic impact of the housing reform.

“We are urging the provincial government to reassess the local vacation resort communities in our area that have not been deemed exempt,” said Kirndee Nahal, Greater Vernon Chamber president.

“The resort communities impacted are not close to transit and are likely not the affordable living accommodations the legislation is hoping to target. These are communities built upon short-term rental models to drive tourism, which is a massive economic driver for the Okanagan, and would be threatened.”

While many tourism providers such as Big White and Silver Star have been exempted from the legislation, others like [Predator Ridge](#) and [Outback Lakeside Resort](#) have not.

Claus Larsen, director of accommodation at Predator Ridge, says more than 300 people could be at risk of losing their jobs if the golf resort must meet the new legislation.

“We’re no different than Big White or Silver Star. We’re outside of town, and we’re zoned for short-term rentals. The consequences if we do not get exempt would be dire,” said Larsen. “The loss of jobs is our main concern.”

Short-term rental accommodations account for between \$3 and \$4 million in revenue per year at Predator Ridge. While the resort does have a long-term rental project known as The District, these unfurnished properties start at \$4,500 per month.

“That’s the type of accommodation we have at Predator Ridge. Our resort is full of million-dollar homes and condos,” said Larsen. “That doesn’t create affordable houses. If we’re not exempted, we’re going to stand empty.”

The Greater Vernon Chamber is encouraging the provincial government to consult with stakeholders to further understand the unintended impacts. The Chamber’s task force also recommends giving municipalities the right to determine and apply for exempted areas through commercial tourism zoning. To further support long-term rental availability, the task force suggests a reassessment of the Residential Tenancy Act to entice property owners to lease their homes to long-term tenants.

The task force has raised these and other concerns with Vernon-Monashee MLA Harwinder Sandhu, who has brought stakeholders and local tourism providers’ concerns and recommendations to Victoria.

“We appreciate that the provincial government has recognized and is taking action to address the issue of affordable and attainable housing in our province. We understand the legislation is meant to increase the availability of long-term housing options,” said Nahal.

“This intended objective is undeniably important for families to be able to sustain a basic quality of life in our province and reassure employers that they will be able to attract skilled workers to their regions. However, there are potentially negative impacts to the community that need to be addressed.”

[Visit the Chamber online](#) to read the full letter sent to MLA Sandhu.

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