



June 17th 2021

Dear Mayor and Council of Oak Bay,

*This letter was written on the unceded, unsundered territories of the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ peoples.*

My name is Robin Pollard and I am the Director of Campaigns and Community Relations at the University of Victoria Students' Society (UVSS), I am also a resident and member of the Oak Bay community. As a Director of the UVSS, representing over 19,000 undergraduate students at UVic, I urge the mayor and council to move forward with approving and regularizing secondary accommodations.

As university students, recent graduates and young professionals hoping to develop our careers and contribute our skills and passions within the Oak Bay community, we are finding the severe lack of housing availability and affordability to be a fundamental barrier to finding suitable, safe, affordable and stable housing.

The Greater Victoria area has been facing a housing crisis for years. This rental housing crisis is more pronounced in Oak Bay due to existing regulations. Not allowing secondary suites and accommodations has meant there is a shortage of rental housing supply. As the Oak Bay Housing Needs report notes, "post-secondary students are facing significant housing challenges in the region & local educational institutions report difficulty attracting & retaining staff".

There will be an influx of students returning to Greater Victoria this summer<sup>1</sup> as we anticipate a return to campus in the fall. Most students live off campus, with an estimated 78% of UVic students living in various communities in Greater Victoria in 2018.<sup>2</sup> Secondary accommodations do already exist in Oak Bay -- it's just that they are unregulated, which poses risks for tenants and homeowners alike. According to the District of Oak Bay itself, there are an estimated 500 to 800 unregulated secondary suites. Regulating secondary suites would allow these already-existing tenancies to be covered under the BC Residential Tenancy Act, providing benefits and security to both tenants and

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<sup>1</sup> Korte, Kate. "UVic Students Say Victoria's Rental Market Is Driving Grads Away." Capital Daily, The Capital, 16 Feb. 2021, [www.capitaldaily.ca/news/uvic-students-victorias-rental-market-brain-drain](http://www.capitaldaily.ca/news/uvic-students-victorias-rental-market-brain-drain).

<sup>2</sup> Fagan, Emily. "I Didn't Stand a Chance": International Students Face Discrimination in Tight Victoria Housing Market." Martlet, 9 Jan. 2020, [www.martlet.ca/i-didnt-stand-a-chance-international-students-face-discrimination-in-tight-victoria-housing-market/](http://www.martlet.ca/i-didnt-stand-a-chance-international-students-face-discrimination-in-tight-victoria-housing-market/).

landlords, including increased safety and stability for tenants, as well as processes to address issues and disputes, should they arise.

We are glad to see that many Oak Bay residents agree, with 78% expressing support for regulating secondary accommodations during consultation around the Official Community Plan. We want to ensure that those Oak Bay homeowners who do wish to create secondary suites and accommodations are able to do so without unnecessarily restrictive, onerous, or expensive requirements (costs which, we fear, will serve to further increase the price for renters).

We recognize you must have various concerns regarding the allowance of secondary suites in your community. With regard to concerns about space for parking, car ownership rates are often lower among students compared to other residents in Oak Bay; we remind you that according to a 2021 UVSS survey, public transit is the number one mode of transportation for undergraduate students. Many students also rely on active transportation like walking and cycling, with fewer than one-in-five students expressing that a car or private vehicle was their main mode of transportation.

With regard to concerns about community character, many students and recent graduates value not only the charm that characterizes Oak Bay, but also the wonderful community and the employment opportunities that various local businesses lend. We would appreciate the opportunity to be involved in an Oak Bay community that supports our specific needs as students while we grow our university careers and flourish as young professionals.

We believe that Oak Bay would benefit, now and in the future, from having more young adults welcomed into, and engaging with, the community. For this to happen, Oak Bay Council must remove the restrictive policies that unnecessarily make it seem like wanting to take up residence is an illegal activity. These policies include the restrictive housing occupancy limits, and the issue in conversation today: that of regularizing secondary suites.

Residents of Oak Bay benefit in many ways from the presence of a vibrant university community on their doorstep. Oak Bay must do its part to be a good partner in that relationship by ensuring that it does not further contribute to shortage of housing options which act as a significant deterrent to enrolment of students and faculty accepting positions. Regularizing secondary accommodation is a step in the right direction.

Sincerely,

*Robin Pollard*

Director of Campaigns and Community Relations

Signed on behalf of the University of Victoria Students' Society