

From: [Thomas Morphet](#)
To: [David Long](#)
Subject: what to do with yurts
Date: Wednesday, August 4, 2021 9:07:05 PM

EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not open links or attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

From www.tommorphet.com

There's a yurt next door to my place, eight miles out the road and in the woods. It's not a problem.

Yurts, wall tents, plywood shacks. Many successful people in this town got their start camping out. It's almost a rite of passage. Others here for decades still choose the rustic life for privacy and simplicity. Few pipes to freeze mean fewer bills to pay.

Let's thank our stars our valley still offers the rugged life for those who embrace it.

But the question before our borough government now is a very different one: It's whether yurts, a type of elaborate tent, should be permitted in all zones. This is a zoning question, and not a simple one.

For years, planning and zoning in Haines worked this way: Out the road, you could live in a hut and poop in a hole. In town, there were rules. You needed a structure to live in that had walls and a permanent foundation and a toilet, for starters. Tents, camper vans and the like were not permitted in residential neighborhoods.

Inside the boundaries of the townsite, residential trailers were restricted to designated trailer parks and commercial trailers were prohibited. Residential trailers and tents were still okay out in the boonies beyond the water and sewer lines, where lots tended to be larger and the neighbors farther apart.

The reason for these rules was legitimate: People who made an investment in a valuable house in an expensive town neighborhood didn't want to lose that value if someone decided they wanted to drag a trailer – or a yurt, for that matter – onto the lot next door.

Zoning means there are different rules in different areas for different uses. It's a system of managing towns intended to provide freedom of choice but also to bring some orderliness to our use of land. Having businesses and vital offices in the downtown core, for example, makes shopping convenient and saves us from driving all over creation to run errands. It also keeps car traffic down in residential neighborhoods where people walk and tykes play.

Planning and zoning came after thousands of years of bad decisions in human settlements resulted in bad consequences. Sewage went the wrong direction. Diseases broke out. Factories operating amid homes spewed poison onto children out playing in their yards.

Planning and enforcement of zoning regulations were relatively uneventful until about 15 years ago when the Haines Borough Planning Commission started disregarding its own rules. Suddenly, commercial trailers no longer were prohibited if they were propped up on cinder blocks and the tires removed. Industrial gravel pits were permitted in residential neighborhoods.

House trailers started popping up outside trailer parks and most recently, a person started living in a fifth-wheel trailer on Main Street. And why not? There's a trailer park now behind the old Elks Lodge, a leap in logic apparently owed to the fact that Elks traveling through town once were allowed to park their RVs there.

At the same time, other rules – like restrictions on junkyards in the townsite or the use of lots for storing industrial equipment – simply went unenforced. The borough staff gave up on enforcement and started requiring residents to rat out their neighbors to enforce zoning code.

Summertime food trailers were permitted because there are some in downtown Portland.

So maybe it's understandable that young people showing up here and looking around can't understand why they can't put up a yurt in Highlands Estates. Will their yurt look any worse than the asphalt slab we've made of our waterfront or the overgrown junkyard a block from Main Street?

The kids have a point, but they don't have a good cause. Allowing everyone in town to do as they please with their properties effectively wrecks the town and reduces property values for everyone.

To remedy the current mess, a few things need to happen including that our appointed planning commission needs to be replaced with an elected one and the borough staff must start enforcing code. It's that or we will all soon be living in north Tijuana.

Still, I have some sympathy for the kids. We've run up the cost of education so high that many of them arrive here as indentured servants. So here's a solution. Allow yurts in designated trailer parks in the townsite.

Or better yet, the Haines Borough could buy Leonard Dubber's trailer park on

Haines Highway and turn it into a Yurt City. December's flood wiped out four units in the park, so there's plenty of room. Also, yurts typically are built atop pilings, which would reduce or eliminate the potential damage from future flooding at the site.

Living together, the yurt kids could share yurt knowledge and know-how and create their own community. We could go visit them in their tents for tea. It would be delightful.

That would help the town, Leonard and the yurt kids, too.