

From: [Schaal](#)
To: [Water Use \(2022\)](#)
Cc: [Water Use \(2022\)](#); [Water Use \(2022\)](#); [Schaal, Kyle \(2022\)](#)
Subject: Board File No. 210295 LUT Committee January 31, 2022
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Dear Ms. Major,

Over the past few years I have suggested to the Planning Commission and Staff that it would be valuable information to have a sense of how much of the market rate, condo, large multi-unit housing is occupied full time.

And that a study of water bills could give Decision Makers a reasonable insight into full time occupancy.

It seems logical to think that looking at the water bills in bulk for a sample of the large, multi-unit, market rate, condo housing approved on the East Side (SOMA, Upper Market, etc) over the past decade or so could determine the type of occupancy based on water usage....are a percentage of units likely to be lived in full time, part time or never?

As I am sure the Supervisors (and their Staffs) proposing this hearing are aware, many other cities around the world are grappling with this vacancy issue. (Vancouver has had a vacancy tax for a number of years now and other cities are proposing one).

Attached is a screenshot from a Bloomberg Wealth online article citing water usage as an indicator of occupancy in Melbourne, Australia. The article is from [August 15, 2021](#) about effectiveness of the Vacancy Tax in Vancouver.

Regardless of whether a vacancy tax is effective or not is perhaps a debate for another day, but it certainly seems like water usage as an indicator of occupancy would be good data for Decision Makers to have going forward.

Common sense experience about our own water bills when we are away from our home for vacation or a period of time: The monthly bill shows a dip in usage and a lower amount charged.

It seems like a percentage of units not lived in full time could be deduced by looking at water bills in bulk without violating anyone's privacy and a method to construct such a study could be easily concocted by the appropriate City Staff.

Thank you for this hearing on this important housing issue.

Sincerely,
Georgia Schuttish
Noe Valley Resident

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That's a huge disappointment to advocates like Karl Fitzgerald, director of research at Prosper Australia, a nonprofit focused on tax reform. In 2019, he estimates, there were 24,042 properties in Melbourne that consumed zero liters of water a day, meaning they couldn't have been occupied. Prior to the tax's introduction, real estate professionals pointed out it was easy enough to hire someone to come in and turn on the lights to make a place lived in.

"If Vancouver is the best-functioning vacancy tax then Melbourne is the worst," Fitzgerald said. "There is just no enforcement."

Fitzgerald now believes that a beefed-up land levy, where both land and property is taxed regardless of use each year, might be a simpler way to discourage speculative buying and encourage developers and owners to make more properties available for use.

The state of Victoria relies primarily on self-reporting from owners, and those who intentionally disregard the law face penalty tax rates