

Code enforcement becoming a priority for South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Inconsistent code enforcement in South Lake Tahoe may be rectified soon.

The City Council at a workshop last week was given an update by staff on where the city stands in streamlining this issue.



Hilary Roverud, Development Services director, told the electeds developing a dedicated code enforcement division will help bring consistency to enforcement. It's too soon to say what that division would look like.

But the problem today is community service officers, the building division, engineering and streets divisions, planning, fire, and finance all are required to enforce various city codes. Therein lies the inconsistency with when things are enforced and the consequences associated with infractions.

Another reason to have staff dedicated to enforcement is that with fewer people working for the city, enforcement is often driven by complaints.

"When you have inconsistent enforcement, you tend to have more violations," Roverud said.

Right now many people violating some policy have multiple avenues to keep appealing the process and never paying a dime to tie up staff time.

To put some teeth into various codes staff is recommending fines be upfront, with the violators able to be refunded the

payment if they win their case.

“It would be modeled after parking where they are fined. They can have a hearing. There is one single appeal,” Roverud said. “The idea here is to have one appeal opportunity. Who that appeal would go to is open for discussion.”

Mayor Hal Cole said he would like to look into hiring a part-time employee dedicated to making sure vacation rentals are paying their transient occupancy tax and other city fees, with the rationale that the income collected would more than pay that person’s wages.

“It’s a priority to me because of the lost revenue,” Cole said.

Roverud said while finding the properties online is one thing; it is catching people violating the rules that can be more problematic and time consuming.

On a side note, Police Chief Brian Uhler said 38 locations have been identified since March and are now paying up. But he admitted it is an “involved process.”

City Attorney Patrick Enright said, “We do need seed money to start the process.” The process being a dedicated enforcement division.

The theory is the pot of cash would be a revolving fund that would constantly fund itself via fines not currently being collected, paying for the work not currently being done.

“The idea is to take a few key priorities and simplify things,” Uhler said. As the program evolves more codes could be added to the list for the team to enforce.

City Manager Tony O’Rourke said public safety issues should be No. 1 on the list of enforcement issues.

Uhler, who is also the fire chief this fiscal year, said it’s

a priority for him to have a fire code officer. A report released earlier this fall was highly critical of South Lake Tahoe's fire code enforcement.

Staff will refine some of its ideas, with possible changes to how enforcement is done and potential creation of a separate division to be on a future council agenda.