

South Lake Tahoe cracking down on arts-crafts festivals, outdoor displays by businesses

By Kathryn Reed

Who gets to sell what and where dominated Tuesday's South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting. At the root of the discussion is what the five electeds want the city to look like.

Less junky was the overwhelming, though not unanimous, decision.

No longer will arts and crafts festivals be allowed in South Lake Tahoe every weekend during the summer. Starting in 2014 four will be allowed instead of the current 12.



Anderson's has a special use permit that allows it to display its bikes in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN

This topic is usually a heated discussion and Sept. 3 did not disappoint. Voting against the change in numbers were councilmembers Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner.

"They add to the ambiance of the community," Davis said of the fairs. "They are selling what the customer wants."

Conner said she sees locals as vendors and customers at the fairs.

The topic was brought forward because in the past the promoter had to give \$5,000 from each event to a local nonprofit. A recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling has made this mandate by governments illegal.

"I have consistently felt that arts and crafts shows have been detrimental to the city," Councilman Hal Cole said. He has voted for them in the past because of the nonprofit component.

He believes tourists have a limited amount of discretionary income and that offering these fairs takes away from established businesses.

Loretta Bookhammer with the Tahoe Art League told the council that promoter Bob Williams, who secures all 12 festivals, allows their members free booth space. Artists then give a percentage of their proceeds to TAL. She lobbied for as many fairs as possible.

The council was open to a larger juried art festival that might fall under a special event and not a crafts fair that would allow TAL to make money.

On a related matter the council was in unanimous agreement to actually enforce the ordinance on the books that deals with outdoor displays.

"I think the policy helps improve our built environment," Councilmember Brooke Laine said. "You can't just put all of your goods on the sidewalk."

But Davis cited specific businesses that rent bikes, standup paddleboards and sell wood carved bears that ought to be allowed to display their wares. He worries businesses will go

out of business if the ordinance is enforced.

City Attorney Tom Watson admonished him by saying that would be favoritism and the council can't do that. The policy must apply to everyone and be enforced equitably.

"By enforcing (the ordinance) we are going to say take down the display by Oct. 15," City Manager Nancy Kerry said. The plan is to send a letter to the offenders explaining the rules and telling them they don't get to break them again in the spring when the weather is nice.

A business like Anderson's Bike Rentals has a special use permit so it can display its bikes.

The goal of the ordinance is to not allow businesses to take things out of their store and clutter the entrance and walkway with goods.

The ordinance allows businesses to seek a special permit to have outdoor sales or the like four times a year.

Councilwoman Angela Swanson said the predominant complaint she hears from constituents is how "crummy" the town looks. And the outdoor displays are one example of that crumminess.

The amended ordinance, which had a 5-0 vote, calls for no longer allowing food trucks or any mobile vending business to receive a temporary use permit that would allow it to be parked at a business for up to six months.

The amendment now allows temporary activities for four days with four days between the activities. Security deposits for these activities will be required to discourage violations of the ordinance.

This was the first reading of the ordinance, with the second expected at the Sept. 17 council meeting.

The council agreed at a future meeting to come up with a

policy regarding mobile vendors, whether certain businesses may have outdoor displays on a more permanent basis, and whether there is flexibility with the four special events a year at any one location. The latter is a Tahoe Regional Planning Agency mandate.