

Vacation rental rules changing in South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Vacation rental owners are likely going to have to pay more money to get a permit in South Lake Tahoe as well as contend with other new regulations.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council on Feb. 17 spent the bulk of the meeting talking about how to revise the 2003 ordinance that was amended in 2011.

The council is going to have a public workshop soon to gather more input. After that, a revised ordinance is expected to come back to the council for adoption in April.

Noise is the No. 1 complaint about vacation renters. Some of the proposed ordinance changes are the result of those complaints.

Of the 1,574 permitted vacation rentals in the city, there were 158 calls to 911 complaining about a vacation rental. Not everyone who spoke Tuesday believes that is enough of a problem to warrant changes. But those also don't account for all of the complainers.

"The city routinely receives complaints. The number of calls about general complaints are not tracked, as they come into various offices within the city," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A major issue still to be resolved is what to do with Airbnb like rentals where people are in their residence renting a room, a bed or even a mattress. There was no consensus among the council members as to whether those types of rentals should be subject to paying the transient occupancy tax.

What the council did agree to is to change the code so only two people may stay in a room unless the occupants are 10 years old or younger.

When it comes to occupancy limits, the word "overnight" will be removed. This means groups that rent multiple houses on a street cannot legally visit one another. If the house sleeps eight – then only eight people are allowed in the house no matter the time of day.

It was pointed out, though, that all enforcement regarding vacation rentals is complaint driven. Police officers aren't going to be peeking in windows to see how many people are gathered around the dinner table.

Outdoor hot tubs will be off limits after 10pm. This came about because people were complaining of loud talkers after that hour. Part of the problem is people tend to raise their voices when the jets are on.

But, again, cops aren't going to be looking over fences to see if people are soaking after hours unless neighbors complain.

While some members of the public suggested requiring rentals have a kill switch for the bubbles at 10pm, the council went with the more restrictive "no hot tubing after 10pm" mandate. And for those who want to violate that policy, the penalty starts at \$250 and could escalate to the owner losing his or her vacation rental permit.

Amplified music after 10pm is going to be a no-no, too, with the same punishment for not following the rules.

The council opted to forego the staff recommendation to provide free parking permits to neighborhoods impacted by the vacation rentals.

Forcing renters to park immediately in front of the home will be removed from the code because it's not enforceable.

Still to be decided is how many bear boxes a rental might need to install if and when there are trash violations.

The exact fee structure is also up in the air. Those who manage their own rentals will pay more than those that are locally managed. "Professionally managed" was changed to "locally managed" to accommodate owner-occupied Airbnb'ers as well as people who live in the area and have vacation rentals.

The issue is that out-of-town owners who don't use a management firm tend to have more infractions. The higher fee is designed to be an incentive for them to turn control over to someone locally.

The city said increasing fees is necessary so more enforcement personnel may be hired. The part-time compliance auditor position is going to be full time, and a full-time enforcement officer will be hired. Those salaries will be paid with the fees.

While the council agreed to the above recommendations, the electeds can still change their minds before the vote. (Councilman Tom Davis recused himself from the discussion and direction to staff because of his affiliation with Tahoe Keys Resort.)