

S. Tahoe to regulate long-term motel rentals

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe wants to put motels that are being used as long-term housing under a microscope to ensure they comply with health and safety codes.

There are 120 hotel-motels in the city with about 5,000 rooms. Of those, 58 establishments have 1,300 rooms that are not being used for traditional tourist accommodations. That equates to 26 percent of the rooms in the city.

“They are not high-quality transitional housing,” Shawna Brekke-Read, Development Services director, told the City Council on March 3.

The draft Single Room Occupancy ordinance was before the council for discussion and input on Tuesday. The goal is to get these establishments to pay transient occupancy tax or be part of the new ordinance that is expected to be adopted this spring.

Using motels as housing is not regulated nor do the units face any inspections because there are no laws on the books that would allow this to happen. That is all about to change.

Problems at these dwellings are varied.

The staff report says, “Commonly, long-term hotels-motels lack a kitchen or safe cooking facilities, the electrical service is inadequate for the electrical demand, hot water heaters are broken or missing, sanitation is poor, smoke detectors are missing or faulty plumbing is problematic, and units are infested with pests.”

But not everyone believes all of these motels should be cast

as squalor. Ted Long, a local attorney who used to be on the City Council, represents 60 units managed by Tahoe Rents.

“All the landlords I know want to do the right thing,” Long told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We don’t need a special ordinance for hotels. The people who are going to be hurt, despite the good intentions, are the people who live there.”

Long said the city is lumping all long-term rentals into the same category and adds that is not fair. He would prefer the motels fall under the multi-family dwelling ordinance that covers six units or more.

While the proposed ordinance would require the hotel rooms to be more like an apartment, Mayor Hal Cole stressed, “We are not turning hotels into apartments.” He said the ordinance creates hybrid-housing units that will be regulated.

Plus, if these hotels were to be apartment conversions, it would require the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to be involved. It would also negate the city’s ability to collect the hotel tax.

It was agreed that requiring laundry facilities on each floor is not a good idea based on overflows being common when people cram two loads into one washer.

Another issue for Long and some of the landlords who attended the meeting is having to provide one off-site parking spot for every unit. Outside council chambers they talked about how many of their tenants don’t even own a vehicle.

The council (Tom Davis was out ill) agreed to soon conduct a workshop about the proposed ordinance with the goal of attracting more owners and tenants. It was proposed to do so somewhere other than the airport since buses don’t go there and transportation may be an issue for people living in these establishments.

Also needing clarification is whether sewer permits will be needed to accommodate possible required changes.

Richard Solbrig, general manager of South Tahoe Public Utility District, told *Lake Tahoe News* sewer permits are needed “when the plumbing facilities in a structure are expanded/added, not just rearranged or replaced with new fixtures. Typically in a private residence, it is the addition of a new bathroom. A new sewer unit costs \$4,950. Any expansion of plumbing facilities in a structure does trigger a building department permit, and part of that permit process is a sign-off by the district.”

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In other action:

- Council meetings have not been available to Charter customers because the city and cable provider are squabbling over use of the building where the city’s equipment is stored. Meetings may be watched online via the city’s website.
- The city is revisiting its arts and crafts fair regulations for 2016. The council directed planning commissioners to refine what juried shows would look like as well to provide more specifics regarding uniform booths for vendors.
- The March 17 meeting will include an in-depth discussion about what to do with the city’s dilapidated streets.
- At the April 7 meeting as part of the midyear budget discussion the council will talk about how best to spend the nearly \$1 million surplus from the 2013-14 budget.