

No resolution to SLT vacation rental policy



Real estate agent Stan Freeman let's people know his view on vacation homes. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

With two-thirds of the vacation rentals in South Lake Tahoe being in residential neighborhoods, it is big business. It also means non-traditional neighborhoods are being created.

Those are the overriding issues when it comes to vacation home rentals – economics vs. locals not wanting residences used as a business.

Since the City Council has been toying with tweaking the VHR ordinance the number of VHR permits has gone from about 1,600 to 1,800.

Before Tuesday's City Council meeting the real estate community mailed material from its viewpoint in regards to property values and private property rights if the proposed ordinance became law. Then they and other advocates filled council chambers and the lobby June 16 to make their case.

City staff at the meeting stressed that private property rights don't allow people to essentially run a business from their home without oversight. The city's perspective is that vacation home rentals are a land use issue.

Those in support of the city's proposed ordinance were in the minority by a long shot. But if they don't ultimately get their way, there is talk of asking the voters to be the ultimate decision makers. This is much like when people didn't want parking meters; a ballot measure ended that practice. This means VHRs could also be cast aside by voters.



Police Chief Brian Uhler escorts Jim Morris away from the podium.

Advocates for this type of lodging point to how this is the way of the future and that VHRs are growing. They also say even the threat of drastic changes is getting home buyers to rethink purchasing in the city limits.

Repeatedly most of the 27 people who spoke Tuesday said enforce the rules on the books so it can be determined if a problem really exists, then address problems at that point.

The city is also doing a "holistic evaluation of VHRs from quality of life issues to zoning, real estate values, residential impacts" and more. This should be finished in spring 2016. There were multiple requests to wait to see what that study produces before changing anything.

Ultimately, after three hours of testimony and deliberations by the four council members it was decided that Wendy David and Austin Sass would form a subcommittee to further look at the issue. (Tom Davis recused himself because of his interest in Tahoe Keys Resort.) David is a supporter of VHRs, saying she lives among them and uses them when she travels. Sass is the most vocally opposed councilmember, repeatedly asking that there be a maximum number of VHRs. However, the only types of businesses the council has restricted are medical marijuana, and the sale of puppies and kittens.

The duo will decide if workshops will be conducted or if stakeholders will be part of the committee or some other scenario is created with the ultimate goal of reaching consensus so the entire council then votes on something.

The electeds did agree the subcommittee is to work on a permit procedure that goes beyond today's administrative process, to not mandate ADA requirements beyond state and federal rules, to allow residential input but not allow neighbors to have veto power, and to not force those with hot tubs to meet the same guidelines as hotels.

The meeting was conducted in a civil manner except for when

Jim Morris with Lake Tahoe Accommodations verbally attacked the council, the city manager and city attorney, wouldn't leave the podium and had to be escorted away by the police chief. He also nearly got in a fight at a previous meeting with someone who had an opposing view. And he has filed a lawsuit against the city.

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In other action:

- The council passed the single residency hotel ordinance on a 4-1 vote. Councilman Tom Davis wanted more time to discuss the issue with those who will be affected.