

Letter: A plea to change SLT VHR rule

Publisher's note: *The following letter was read at the May 17 South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting and is reprinted with permission.*

My name is Asha Whipple and I own two cabins in South Lake. I have been an Airbnb property renter for a couple years and I use the additional income to help pay for repairs and to make property improvements.

I am permitted, have adequate paved parking, have always had smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, proper signage and fire extinguishers as well as a local contact. I have paid thousands in TOT taxes and permitting fees on time. I have never had any problems, not with neighbors, trash, noise complaints. Nothing.

I take issue with you singling out multi-family properties to exclude [them] from the VHR program.

I recently spent nearly a thousand dollars making additional renovations per your exhaustive new requirements to be able to continue as a VHR, only to find out you are now considering revoking my permit simply because I own two cabins on one lot. I do not understand why you would recommend to discriminate against a property like mine. It is the perfect situation for a VHR. My front house has long-term renters, they are my local contact and they keep an eye on the property. It ensures that none of the typical VHR problems occur. In return they get a nicer place for more affordable rent. My back cabin is for our family's use and we rent it out on holidays and weekends we are not up here on Airbnb.

My cabins are surrounded by low income apartments, a strip mall with a smoke shop, a cheap motel and vacant land. I can

hardly see how someone like me could be doing anything but improving the neighborhood. But you seem to have no interest in looking at homes on a case by case basis, rather preferring these broad sweeping restrictions which only haphazardly address the issues. To be perfectly clear, I rent my personal home. Our cabin would never be leased long term regardless and this ban only disrupts my ability to provide my front renters with affordable housing. By revoking my permit you are forcing me to raise the rent on my front lease, thus working against your own goal of achieving more affordable housing. Why not just look at these few multi-family situations on a case by case basis? We already have to be inspected and approved individually.

You have already spent exorbitant time and energy continuously tightening and restricting good owners who pay thousands in taxes and are following all the rules. I have seen restriction after restriction come my way despite my rental having zero problems ever. Meanwhile there has been minimal effort on cracking down at all on all the people renting unpermitted and under the table.

Please stop limiting opportunity for owners like me trying to improve their properties. VHRs add to the tourism economy and enables people to buy and fix up otherwise crumbling properties, thus improving neighborhoods and the real estate economy. Start putting your energy into enforcing the rules you have already established and getting more unpermitted owners on board, and then let the restrictions you have already set have some time to work before continuing to slowly choke this revenue possibility to death.

I am very disappointed in our current City Council and I will be trying to vote in leaders that take a more open-minded, community involved approach to leadership this next election. I urge anyone looking to invest in small business or thinking of running a VHR to do so in the county, this city council has made it a nightmare to operate within the city limits.

Asha Whipple, South Lake Tahoe