

Rough start to summer at SLT's Beach Retreat

By Kathryn Reed

Call it what you want – Connolly Beach, Timber Cove Beach, Beach Retreat – just don't call it Party Beach.

The latter is essentially what owners of Tahoe Beach Retreat and Lodge would have preferred based on the slew of events they had planned for this summer.

The problem, though, is no permits were ever obtained for the activities. And on top of that the private beach has a public easement on it. This means anyone can use the sand – to walk, sunbathe, picnic or swim – from June 1-Sept. 30, dawn to dusk.

The public component came about from a court case that started in the 1970s. It says access will not be thwarted.

Putting up temporary structures whether it's for a wedding, a volleyball tournament or outdoor bar are considered impediments.

In the three years that Urbana has owned the South Lake Tahoe hotel there has been an ongoing battle with city officials as well as residents.

At Tuesday's City Council meeting the electeds on a 4-1 vote decided to mostly enforce its rules. Councilman Tom Davis was the dissenter, saying he wanted to cut them "slack". The others didn't support favoritism.

City code says certain temporary activities require a permit and that there can only be four a year. The city wants to ensure fire safety, parking, amplified music and temporary structures are regulated.

A wedding would be considered one event. The Beach Retreat, which is getting out of the business of weddings on the beach, has three planned for this summer. They will be allowed to go on and not count toward the four activities.

City and hotel staff will work together to figure out which activities require a permit and which don't. A hula-hoop contest might be fine, while a luau would likely need a permit.

Until it is resolved the Beach Retreat is not allowed to have events. If they do, citations start at \$250 and go up to \$1,000.

The city has already had to go after property owners for putting up art at the beach without a permit.

The hotel has applied for a license with ABC to serve liquor on the beach. The city has filed a protest letter.

Police Chief Brian Uhler said without a controlled area for where adult beverages can be consumed, it would create an enforcement nightmare for officers.

While Brandon Reed, who manages the property, started his testimony with a bitter tone, and essentially said how the owners \$24 million investment in the property should be worth some favors, ended his speech in a more conciliatory manner. Still, he never apologized for his actions.

He and others said the public is welcome to most of the events, and that without them the property would not remain viable.

Councilman Austin Sass said, "Putting art up without a permit – you should have known that would piss people off. You can't keep doing the stuff you are doing and expect people to discuss (issues)."