

SLT council revises VHR rules –again

By Kathryn Reed

The South Lake Tahoe City Council did a 180 Tuesday regarding regulating multifamily properties as vacation rentals, while at the same time mandating those renting a room on a short-term basis have a permit to do so.

For now, at least, these nearly 60 multifamily parcels may still use their parcels as tourist accommodation units. This was the recommendation of Councilmembers Wendy David and Austin Sass, who comprise the vacation home rental subcommittee.

David said the reason for the change is having gathered more input from people who would be affected and realizing it would not solve the greater housing issue for locals.

Following the council's decision in May, many of the multifamily owners who are using at least some of their units as a VHR formed a coalition to protect their rights and interests. Now other VHR owners are part of the group. Their goal is to be a buffer between homeowners and the council-staff.

After the first two people spoke June 7, Councilman Hal Cole decided to recuse himself because he owns duplexes. And while they are not now used as VHRs, the option is open to him and therefore he could be financially impacted by the decision. Councilman Tom Davis already recused himself because of being in the VHR business.

Many of the 17 who spoke at the council meeting said they use the residence as income and/or for retirement. Some also live onsite, especially those in duplexes. Most said they are not

rich land barons, but instead have worked hard to acquire income property and need to keep it to pay their bills.

One reason the council originally wanted to limit multifamily VHRs was to provide more long-term housing for permanent residents.

It was pointed out how there is a larger affordable housing problem in town. Most agreed it would not be solved by banning VHRs at multifamily units.

Sass pointed out how in most ski towns employees live elsewhere and commute to their jobs.

Councilwoman JoAnn Conner said if housing is not available for the average worker, then they will be living off the hill, taking their disposable income with them as well as their kids out of local schools.

While multifamily units are still allowed to be rented to tourists today, the council did not promise that this is a long-term decision. Instead, David-Sass-Conner said they want to revisit the issue again – and soon – as well as have a larger discussion about housing for residents.

As of May 5, there were 1,862 VHR permits in South Lake Tahoe. Total permits as of: January 2015 – 1,549; October 2015 – 1,906; and January 2016 – 1,874. Since Oct. 1, 2015, there have been 106 new VHR permits approved by the zoning administrator.

The ordinance takes effect in 30 days. Also at that time anyone using any part of his or her residence as a vacation rental must collect transient occupancy tax.

At the June 21 meeting the council will review the submitted bids for an economic study about vacation rentals.