

SLT altering VHR, massage, cab ordinances

By Kathryn Reed

Tweaking ordinances will be the order of the day for the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Aug. 2

The second readings of the vacation home rental, massage and taxi ordinances are on the agenda.

The changes passed unanimously at the first reading last month, with Councilman Tom Davis recusing himself from the VHR discussion because of his affiliation with the Tahoe Keys rental agency.

After getting an earful from owners of multifamily dwellings who are using some or all of the units as vacation rentals, the city back-pedaled with its desire to ban them. Instead, the council will allow the existing units to carry on indefinitely assuming they meet the criteria.

What changes is that no new multifamily parcels may join the vacation home rental market.

Changes to the massage ordinance came about because people suspect some of the \$35/hour establishments have hired people who are not licensed to do the work.

While Police Chief Brian Uhler says there is evidence of human trafficking at these places, no proof has been provided by the department.

Massage therapists will have to fill out an application with the police department. All therapists already had to have a city business license, so now there is redundancy and more paperwork for all involved. Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News* there is not an additional fee for this application process.

However, the staff report from the July 19 meeting says, "The city will recoup the costs of licensing through license application fees."

Therapists must also be licensed through the state. The state mandates therapists have 500 hours of training.

The initial proposal was to give people several months to comply. But after some discussion, including input from massage therapists, that idea was abandoned.

"Either they have a license or they don't," Davis said. "This will bring about the legitimacy we are looking for."

When it came to the taxi ordinance the goal was to put that industry on a level field with the likes of Uber and Lyft. The problem is the city can't regulate those ride share businesses because it is the state Public Utilities Commission that has that obligation.

The only way the city can regulate the ride share drivers is by demanding they have a business license.

The council opted to relax rules pertaining to taxis in town as a way to make the work environment fairer.

The city will no longer:

- Inspect all cabs on an annual basis;
- Manage the operator license process;
- Conduct background checks on drivers.

These services brought in \$17,000 to city coffers.