

SLT trying to get a handle on vacation rentals



Large homes like this one being built near Heavenly Mountain Resort's Cal Lodge to be used as a vacation home rental is adding fuel to the heated issue in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Of the 140 citations South Lake Tahoe has issued to vacation home owners, 68 were for renting without a permit.

The illegal operators are ordered to immediately stop advertising their rental. While they can go through the permit process to come into compliance, it's not a slam dunk to get approved. And once cited, the city keeps an eye on the property to monitor for repeat infractions.

In the last fiscal year the city conducted 24 audits to see if people were paying the amount of transient occupancy tax they

were supposed to. The city has collected \$58,592 in the last year in previously unpaid TOT.

"We collect TOT on the honor system. We can audit them when it seems like they are underreporting," Maureen Stuhlman, who handles vacation home rental enforcement for South Lake Tahoe, said.

Stuhlman and Kevin Fabino, who runs the Community Development department for the city, gave an update on the VHR situation to the City Council last week.

In July during the last VHR presentation, 1,858 VHR permits existed. Today, that number is 1,149. About 426 of those permits are for time shares. One-hundred and thirty have expired since the summer. The city expects another 150 to be considered expired in the next month.

When the new ordinance was enacted in October 2015 an inspection component was added. The criteria have scared some people.

The city has made a concerted effort in the last four months to address expired permits; trying to surmise if people are renting illegally or have gotten out of the business.

"I would say 95 percent of those inspections have been completed," Fabino said. "It has been a huge undertaking to address expired permits. At one time there were 700 to 900."

Fabino said his department is trying to gather better data, but that the city's antiquated system has made it difficult to do so.

Another change in the permit process is allowing people to object to the house becoming a VHR. A zoning administrator reviews any challenges. Part of the criteria is looking at how the rental would impact the character of the neighborhood.

"For us it is a real balancing act," Fabino said.

Jerry Goodman was the only member of the public who spoke at the Dec. 13 meeting. He has a number of vacation rentals on his street and has been a vocal opponent of VHRs. At Tuesday's meeting he stressed that the character of a residential neighborhood would always be changed because these are not residents staying the night.

Another aspect to the VHR is that High Sierra Patrol started working Dec. 16. Now the city is being proactive instead of reactive. Before it was all about responding when a complaint was called in. The people will now regularly patrol areas known to have problem houses. They won't interact with the guests, but instead will call an issue in to the community service officer who will respond to the residence.