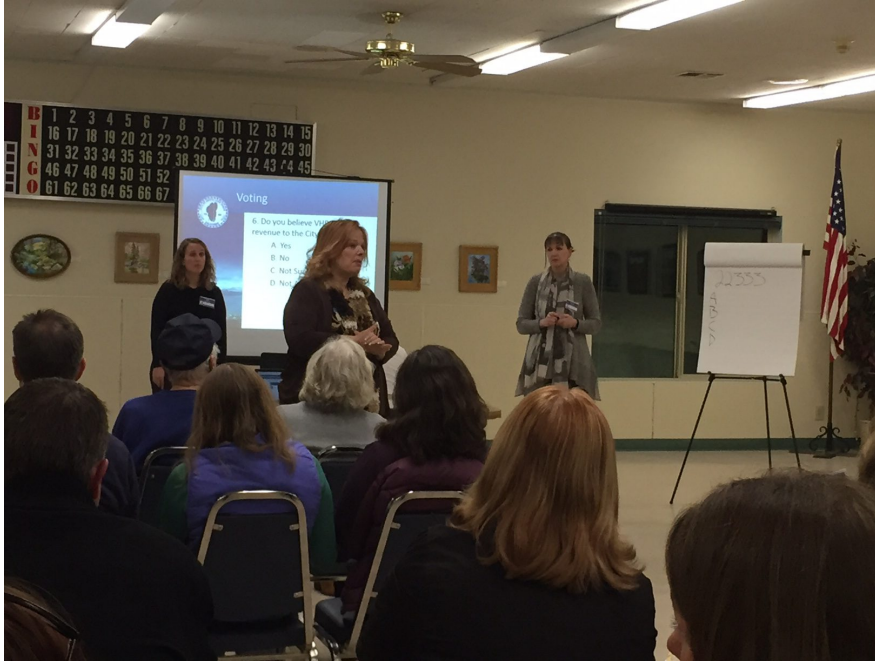


Little consensus on VHRs in S. Lake Tahoe



South Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry addresses questions about VHRs on Jan. 25. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Wednesday night's vacation home rental workshop became more about whining than an information gathering opportunity.

People were becoming angry when the majority didn't agree with them. Those in the room were upset that those voting online often had different answers. Then there were the people who claimed they were not being listened to because they didn't get their way.

South Lake Tahoe is in the throes of an economic study about vacation home rentals. Jan. 25 was the second workshop conducted by consultants Michael Baker International, the group tasked with compiling all the data.

The consultants will be looking at perceptions people have as well as the facts. The preliminary report is expected to be released this spring, with another workshop after that and then the final document to be out in the summer.

From there it will be up to the City Council to decide if any policies are changed.

VHRs have been a regulated entity in the city since 2003. It has been contentious ever since then, with tweaks to the policy coming seemingly every year. The lack of enforcement, neighborhoods becoming party zones, regional regulations and the increasing inability to find long-term rental housing have triggered anger toward VHRs to the point some would like a moratorium or outright ban.

On the flipside is those who want to stay somewhere other than a hotel – whether it's here or elsewhere. Then there are all the people who have a job related to the industry. And there is the money involved.

Ten questions were asked Wednesday. The more than 40 people at the senior center were polled as well as people online. Statistically this survey is not valid, but it did give an indicator of what people are thinking. What isn't known is who was voting online. Those at the meeting were predominately residents, most over 60, and almost all Caucasian.

The answers by people at the meeting are hard numbers, while the online responses are percentages. The number of respondents online for each question were not given. It was possible for online voters to have also voted in person.

The majority believed VHRs expand the lodging options for tourists and provide jobs.

When it came to whether VHRs strain public services, those at the meeting said yes, while those online said no.

When it came to saying whether VHRs in residential areas are an inappropriate use, 21 people at the meeting said yes, 16 said no. The online percentage – 22 percent said yes, 71 percent no.

The question about whether VHRs have a negative impact on the character of a neighborhood also differed between the in-person vs. online response. Yes said the majority physically present, no said those remotely.

Those in person believe VHRs decrease the supply of affordable housing, while those online said the opposite.

VHR owners were asked what they would do if they could not use their property in this manner: 11 percent would make it a long-term rental, 53 percent would leave it vacant, 28 percent would do something else, and 8 percent said “not applicable”. No one at the meeting answered the question, signaling that no VHR owners were in attendance or that they didn’t want to make themselves known to a crowd that was clearly against them.

After the questions were asked and answered the conversation was more directed to city staff.