

Letter: Stop the proliferation of VHRs in SLT

To the community,

I live in a part of South Lake Tahoe with many vacation rental properties. Most are rented to people who just want a nice outdoorsy vacation. But not all. Most are registered with the city and pay appropriate taxes and fees. But not all.

There is a debate now, with many residents concerned about noise, parking and trash associated with rentals, VHR owners and Realtors resistant to change, and city government struggling to improve the situation while enraging the smallest number of people.

There are signs of change – positive things. City government is becoming less responsive to the financial interests of absentee-owners and more to quality of life concerns of residents. There are now online databases of rental properties, and of city responses to complaints about VHR properties. Clean Tahoe continues to do a fine job of cleaning up after the careless, sloppy, and furry. Best of all, enforcement of existing VHR regulations is improving.

City Council has studied our VHR situation, and sought input. For this they should be complimented, but this is a polarizing issue. Council is offering compromise. It's a large improvement, but it doesn't always go far enough. For example, here are some VHR listings in my neighborhood (from the city database), street addresses and allowed occupancy:

3478 Saddle Road – 16

3639 Saddle Road – 20

3739 Saddle Road – 22

1321 Ski Run Blvd. – 18

1399 Wildwood Ave. – 18.

Do people build vacation homes to sleep 22? No. These are hotels, built in residential areas, and they shame us all. A maximum occupancy of a VHR should be included, and should not be based on number of bedrooms. That's the definition of a hotel.

A few weeks ago the city sent me a notice of a nearby vacation home rental application. It went to all homeowners within 300 feet of the applying property, along with a map. Curious, I looked on the city database of VHRs to see how many were already within that 300 feet. And the answer? There are already 21 in the city database, plus one which isn't. Twenty-two VHRs within 300 feet of the applicant, and the city is considering another. A maximum density limit is a must, and should be much lower than current.

Property rights are a frequent rallying cry, as in "I get to do what I want with my property." The proper (polite) response is "nonsense," zoning laws are here to stay, and communities require concessions to neighbors.

Surely the pro-VHR community has the most to lose. Lacking some restrictive compromise it's likely that the issue will end up on a ballot in the near future. In California, ballot initiatives usually involve lots of misinformation, and one can foresee large limitations on VHRs, if not at least a partial ban. Without the VHR taxes, the city would be in financial difficulty. People who bought homes intending to rent would feel victimized. My home would decline in value. Most of us would lose in this situation, but if I'm forced to choose between more of the same or a total VHR ban, I'm voting for a ban.

I'm grateful for the efforts of people who have spent time on the issue. There is a problem, the VHR community need to make many concessions, and by their present intransigence are doing their best to maximize their loss.

Josh Benin, South Lake Tahoe