

SLT limits VHRs to 1,400 in residential areas

By Kathryn Reed

Fourteen hundred. That's the maximum number of vacation home rentals South Lake Tahoe will allow.

After another meeting of the City Council on Nov. 7 where short-term rentals dominated the discussion, it's possible the electeds might let the ink dry on the latest ordinance before revising it yet again. But no promises because already Councilman Jason Collin broached the idea of reducing that number even further. He even wants to revisit this whole topic every six months if not more often.

On a 3-1 vote Tuesday, the first reading of the newest ordinance passed. The second reading is slated for Nov. 21. Then the ordinance takes effect 30 days later. Until then the law of the land is the urgency ordinance approved last month, which called for an immediate moratorium on VHRs.

All of the changes only pertain to the non-tourist core area.

Councilman Tom Davis recused himself from the discussion because of his stake in Tahoe Keys Resort. Councilman Austin Sass voted against the ordinance, stating the only dissatisfaction being the 1,400 number. He preferred the limit be 1,200.

The latest numbers show there are 1,397 VHRs outside the tourist area.

Before that vote was taken Sass was able to bully his way into making sure no new permits are issued until the new ordinance takes effect. Before the council was an agenda item asking to allow the 93 permits that had been submitted to go through the

approval process. At previous meetings that was the sentiment of the majority, but it was not written into the urgency ordinance. Tuesday's measure was in essence a clarification of council's wishes. It required a fourth-fifths vote, but with one councilmember unable to vote, it really had to be a unanimous decision. That didn't happen. The motion failed on a 3-1 vote.

Sass said to allow the permitting process to proceed would be "hypocritical" when his goal was to reduce VHRs.

"We have changed the rules on them halfway through," Councilwoman Brooke Laine said of the applicants. "It's lights out. We didn't intend that."

Laine, Collin and Councilwoman Wendy David were adamant in not wanting to hurt the people who had been going through the process in good faith.

Between 15 and 20 VHR owners choose not to renew their permit each month, so about 200-250 go off the market each year. Of course new ones take their place.

And new ones will still be allowed – just not more than 1,400, and not until Jan. 21.

The current applicants will remain in the pool if they want to be; or they can ask to have the application pulled and be issued a refund. (It costs more than \$500 for a VHR permit.) They will all have to abide by the ordinance that was approved Tuesday.

Some of the key rules in the ordinance include:

- Mandatory bear box, with number of cans based on square footage.
- Occupancy being two per bedroom, plus four.
- No use of hot tub between 10pm and 8am.

- No special treatment for applicants in escrow.
- No zoning administration hearing.
- No notification of neighbors of a new VHR in the area.
- No warnings will be issued; only citations.
- Three violations in 24 months and the permit is revoked.
- Five community service officers will be hired. (One is employed now.)
- Fines of \$1,000 will be issued to renters and owners for each violation.
- Owners will be subject to VHR rules.
- Shared rentals are not part of the ordinance, meaning they don't have to be permitted or pay transient occupancy tax. This topic will be discussed on its own at a future meeting.