

Letter: More to the story on VHRs in SLT

Publisher's note: *This is in response to Joshua Priou's letter.*

Mr. Joshua Priou:

I have done my research and I am well aware of the regulations which I will cite point for point later in my reply. You mention the visit this past weekend, which we both agree met the letter of the regulations with the exception that 11 people self-reported having stayed at this home. How do I know? I spoke with both the bus driver and those leaving your property on Sunday. They reported having been a group from a Bay Area college dorm that had been delivered to multiple homes throughout South Lake Tahoe. Also, we agree that they were well behaved and generally one of the better groups.

What you neglect to include are previous visits that were not so wonderful. During past visits we have seen six to eight cars, boats in the street and 15 or more people arriving and disappearing into the house. We have seen maid visits last overnight and garbage left out for bears. None of which we have reported because we have tried to be good neighbors and respect the rights of the owners of the house. During the past New Year holiday we saw greater than 15 college kids arrive in eight cars. They arrived ahead of their chaperone and relieved themselves in the woods adjacent to the house. We warned your guests in person to follow the guidelines posted or they would be fined. We called the owner who I believe contacted you to ensure they were meeting the requirements cited and posted in their agreement. We did our best to ensure your business was not subjected to fines and adversely affected due to the actions of your guests. Rest assured, I will no longer fail to report violations.

Your description of the ideal vacation home paints a rosy if inaccurate picture. If you bother to read my letter to the City Council you would note that at no point did I suggest any law or regulation was broken. This is why I wrote them in the first place. You describe my letter as having incited an uproar while every other comment I have received has been complimentary in the restraint I applied to this same letter and the "tone" being balanced. I suggest this issue has been simmering in our local community and my letter expressed the same frustration that many others are feeling. Our neighborhoods are being invaded. You can paint this experience any way you like including stating that these massive custom homes are raising our home values and bringing business to our town among other positive implications. What you fail to recognize is that this has become an ever increasing invasion of where real people live.

You cited the regulations ,so let's go through them:

1. All costs associated with responding to the VHR are covered by VHR fees. The city collects over \$700,000 from VHR permit fees. These fees pay for enforcement officers, police, staff, city manager and city attorney. The city has been keeping track of these funds and they always have an overage.

You say this covers the full costs. I may be wrong but I would be surprised if a full accounting of the costs to our town are truly covered by I will accept that I may be wrong on this point.

2. Clean Tahoe is a nonprofit and does respond to all trash issues within the city limits, not just VHRs. There are fines associated with a trash violation that would be charged to the home owner to pay for their services.

My comments to the city suggested the Clean Tahoe program receive funding to pick up excess garbage that is left in the street so that it would not be left out until garbage day

(Thursday in our neighborhood) and thus preventing your property from being fined.

3. There are five dedicated enforcement officers that are paid by VHR permit fees to patrol and respond to neighbor complaints. At this time there is an average of about one call per day to this enforcement team. Not sure if it is necessary to have five of them; the city is looking at this on a trial basis right now.

I agree that five dedicated enforcement officers is excessive. If management agents were consistent in inspecting their properties to ensure their guests were meeting the stated requirements, fewer police would be required and you would be charged less. In the motel industry, guests are directly observed entering and leaving their rooms. VHR guests arrive without anyone present from the management agent to ensure they are within their agreed limits in the number of guests or vehicles. It is up to the local population adjacent to your business to report when your customers are not complying with your requirements.

4. The management agent or owners are held accountable to inspect their VHRs and ensure they are meeting current guidelines. The home owner pays a fee to the city to send a building inspector to the home for safety concerns.

As I stated in my previous comments, rarely is there a representative from the management agent onsite ensuring that their guests are complying with their requirements. Only if the neighbors report an issue does anyone know if your limits are being met.

5. There is a process for residents to contest an existing VHR license. Since 2015, the city required a zoning administration hearing to allow residents to protest a new VHR application. The city provided this hearing at an extraordinary cost to the home owner. It has since been proven to be an unsuccessful

program. Now, if a VHR creates three permit violations within a 24-month period, their license will be revoked and they will not be able to operate as a vacation rental any longer. These violations can be a public disturbance, noise, trash, parking, and over occupancy issues.

As I stated in my letter, there are no other options for local residence to contest a VHR for issues not covered in the three strikes or initial contracting phase. The home across the street became a VHR with no notice to the local residents. Most residents do not know a VHR is being set up until the signs go up and the visitors arrive.

I have tried to be fair in my comments. I believe there is room in our town for both local home owners and VHRs as there has been in the past. The explosion in the popularity of VHRs over our well used hotels and motels has caused these issues. It is this very success that has brought these problems. It is fair for local home owners to insist that VHR owners and management agents take responsibility for their guests. It is reasonable to want owners and/or management agents at least be present when their guests arrive to ensure their own restrictions are being followed. It is in your interest and it is in the interest of the residents whose neighborhood you are operating in.

Sincerely,

Scott Ramirez, South Lake Tahoe