

# Letter: Suggestions for VHRs and SnowGlobe

**Publisher's note:** *This is a letter to the South Lake Tahoe City Council and is reprinted with permission.*

Dear Council Members:

My name is Scott Ramirez, I am a longtime resident of South Lake Tahoe. Some of you know me and my family and are familiar with our activities to support our town. We are advocates for our community and volunteer where we can.

Today I am writing you to ask that you consider the needs of the residents in your deliberations and actions. Recent changes in our community demand that we all speak to recurring issues that are either not being addressed or are seemingly being glossed over. Specifically, I wish to address two issues: vacation home rentals (VHRs) and SnowGlobe.

## **Vacation home rentals (VHRs):**

I live in the Gardner Mountain area of South Lake Tahoe. I purchased my home in 1996 when I returned after having been away for 10 years for school and work. I grew up in the Bijou area and attended both our local schools and Lake Tahoe Community College before leaving to build my career. I was lucky to be able to return and work in our local schools these past many years. When I purchased my home I purchased what I could afford in a quiet neighborhood with an eye to raising a family. I looked to purchase as much home as I could afford away from the hustle and bustle that tourists bring to our town.

My neighborhood has seen many changes. The formerly empty lot across from my house has since been purchased. The immense house that sits there now was built specifically to house as

many people as possible. The builder lived in the home briefly before selling it as a second home and vacation home rental (VHR). On any given weekend we see four to six cars and six or more people staying there. This weekend we were surprised to see a chartered bus arrive and deliver 11 college kids. The bus arrived at roughly 10:15pm on a Friday night and stopped in the street to deliver our new guests and unload their luggage. A similar bus returned the following Sunday to pick this same group.

I wish I could make this simple and say the current owners were bad and every visitor was rude but that is not the true story. The owners are nice people who are trying to fund their second home by using it as a VHR. Most of our visitors mind their manners. Whether the visitors are good or not or if the home owners are nice is not the point. The point is that our community is rapidly changing and not necessarily for the better. The front of my house is now a bus stop. The house across the street has signs on it declaring the rules for visitation. My neighbors and I are now left wondering will this be a good visit or will this be a bad one. Will there be more cars than the driveway can hold, will they manage the trash and will they quiet down before we need to sleep or will we need to be the bad guys call and complain. Do we need to worry about our kids playing outside?

The new measures to mitigate some of these problems have helped to provide locals tools to respond. The problem is that it remains up to the residents surrounding vacation rentals to report issues when they arrive. We have to be both the inspector and the reporter of activities that should not be going on in our neighborhoods. It is not our job to police other people's businesses. It should be the job of the management agent or the owner if there is no local agent.

I have no illusion that these new businesses are going away. Our community needs flexibility in where our visitors stay and some home owners are paying for their part of Tahoe by renting

their homes out. I also do not wish to complain without offering solutions so here is what I suggest:

- All costs associated with responding to VHR issues should be covered by VHR fees.
- A portion of those fees should go to the Clean Tahoe program, which should be provided a list of participating VHRs and asked to help mitigate excess garbage.
- A dedicated enforcement position (police?) should be created to randomly visit VHRs and ensure they are meeting their parking and occupancy requirements.
- The management agent or owner should be held accountable to inspect their VHRs and ensure they are meeting the current guidelines, it should not be necessary for the surrounding residents to enforce these rules.
- A process for residents to contest an existing VHR license needs to be established beyond the existing reporting process for special circumstances not currently defined.

### **SnowGlobe:**

I will keep this simple. There is no reason an entire neighborhood should be subjected to three days of noise and having access to their homes blocked on an annual basis for a private event. The Al Tahoe, Bijou and Sierra Tract neighborhoods are blasted with sound from SnowGlobe every year. SnowGlobe is exempted from the same rules that apply to the Harveys Outdoor Theater which is required to end their concerts by 10pm. The Harveys event is held in an area zoned for such activities and SnowGlobe is in the middle of three large neighborhoods. I sincerely doubt this would even be a question if the same event was held adjacent to the Tahoe Keys or other wealthy areas. My parents live in the Bijou area near Pioneer Trail adjacent to two current sitting council members. They text us when the music starts because they can feel it inside their home. A friend in the Al Tahoe area tries to

leave town because they cannot sleep in their own home due to the sound from these concerts. A community owned and maintained field is not the appropriate place for this event.

- Find an appropriate venue.
- Enforce existing regulations without exemptions.
- Move this away from residential neighborhoods.

These issues are all seemingly related. zoning laws have been overridden in favor of private entities. The council has been consistent in favoring private party interests and their needs in a hunt to generate questionable revenue gains at the cost to our local residents. Our city incurs expenses related to both these concerns that are not fully covered or funded by those activities. Residents pay in both lost tax revenue to cover those expenses and in terms of having their homes invaded. This is not acceptable and needs to stop.

Please act on behalf of the people who vote for you and for whom you represent. Yes, we need to pursue revenue but not at the cost of our homes and neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

**Scott Ramirez, South Lake Tahoe**