

TRPA board not in sync regarding VHRs

By Kathryn Reed

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's future involvement with vacation home rentals is up in the air based on comments from Governing Board members.

The board received an update about VHRs on Jan. 24 from the bi-state regulatory agency's staff. Part of it included going over what the city and each county in the basin are doing.

About 10 years ago the board made VHRs an allowable use in residential neighborhoods, and for the most part has let individual jurisdictions regulate them how they want. But not everyone agrees with how the local entities are handling the situation so they've asked TRPA to take a more active role.

The Local Government Committee of the TRPA was tasked with delving into the issue a bit. A report was completed in December, with the findings presented this month to the full board.

The report concluded, "Each local jurisdiction is addressing VHRs according to the characteristics and circumstances in each locale: preservation of neighborhood character, permanent resident quality of life, safety and enforcement. The local jurisdictions are acting responsibly to resolve VHR issues so that the concerns of residents and stakeholders, and policies of the Regional Plan are addressed."

The recommendation was to bring annual updates to the whole board.

"I definitely think this is a local issue," Austin Sass, South Lake Tahoe's rep on the board, said Wednesday.

He disagreed with fellow board member Clem Shute who advocated for using the residential allocation process to curtail the proliferation of VHRs. Sass's rationale is that there are so few allocations left that it won't address the issue in any meaningful way. He believes the voters, at least in South Lake Tahoe, will make the ultimate decision regarding the future of VHRs. It's possible competing VHR initiatives will be on the November ballot.

"I will ask RPIC (Regional Plan Implementation Committee) to ask staff to amend the code to limit how our allocations can be used for vacation rentals," Shute said. He wants the allocations to be used for work force/affordable housing – "things that matter to the public."

It was suggested there be a joint meeting between the RPIC and Local Government Committee, to which Executive Director Joanne Marchetta said would really mean bringing the VHR topic back to the whole board because the two committees combined are a majority of the members.

Five members of the public spoke at the meeting. Jesse Patterson with the League to Save Lake Tahoe called VHRs a "pervasive issue" and that his agency supports a "regional assessment."

Jessica Tucker-Mohl, California deputy attorney general, sided with Shute and the League.

The other three were also not big fans of the current VHR situation in the basin.

Sue Novasel, who represents El Dorado County on the TRPA board, recused herself as she awaits a decision from the Fair Political Practices Commission as to whether she has a conflict of interest. Douglas County Commissioner Nancy McDermid was absent from the meeting.