

# S. Tahoe VHR rules getting attention of visitors

By Kathryn Reed

The adage there is no such thing as bad publicity may be tested as South Lake Tahoe's reputation among vacation home renters spreads.

City officials are hoping the negative regional and national media attention about its \$1,000 fines for owners and tourists turns out to be a positive. This is because going after the violators is intended to create a better experience for everyone – local and visitor.

People tend to forget when they are on vacation, staying someplace other than a hotel, that people next door are likely to live there full time. Those residents have jobs to get to that are best performed with a good night's sleep, not a party next door. Visitors don't take into consideration that even though there isn't a fence, the yard next door is private property. For some reason they think the kayak tied up at a nearby dock is something they can use.

And while these examples may be isolated, they are happening enough to have necessitated the City Council to implement stringent rules with penalties that get people's attention. A slap on the wrist wasn't working.

"I did get an email from a potential visitor after the [*Reno Gazette-Journal*] article came out indicating that Lake Tahoe had been on their family's bucket list but they would be removing it based on what they'd read," Carol Chaplin, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I understand the visitor center has had a few folks in who have commented on the unfriendliness of the penalties. I couldn't say if it will have a long-term impact, but my

opinion is that we should be able, as a community, to find balance and respect for both residents and visitors. It's not an issue unique to our destination, so I think we could look to other communities for best practices."

On April 17, the council received its first quarterly update about how the rules that were put into effect just before Christmas are working.

Of the handful of people from the public who spoke, some suggested softening the message the city is putting out by welcoming people before threatening them. One person took issue with the public information officer having boasted about the city's VHR rules being in the news outside the basin, and instead said it was more of a black eye for the city.

Here are some stats from Dec. 22-March 31 regarding the 188 VHR complaints:

- Parking – 105 complaints, 40 violations
- Noise – 34 complaints, 8 violations
- Trash – 7 complaints, 3 violations
- Occupancy – 8 complaints, 1 violation
- Hot tub – 13 complaints, 4 violations
- Camping – 1 complaint, 0 violations
- No sign – 2 complaints, 0 violations
- Unpermitted – 17 complaints, 7 violations
- Miscellaneous – 1 complaint, 0 violations.

Twenty-nine paid the citations without question. Fifty-one percent of the 72 citations have been appealed. Eighteen were dismissed, 11 were upheld with seven of those paying the full amount, the rest are still in the hearing process.

Trash complaints could become a non-issue with bear boxes being mandatory at VHRs starting July 31.

There is bad behavior by locals as well. Going after repeat bogus complainers has been brought up. Then there are the people who are unwelcoming to out-of-towners.

“We’ve heard of visitors being heckled when they arrive at a reserved VHR, which is an unfortunate statement about how we treat people in general,” Chaplin said.

The LTVA board is expected to have a discussion about vacation home rentals in the coming months.

Then there are the visitors who don’t understand why they have to comply with rules they find restrictive such as not going into a hot tub between 10pm and 8am even without jets. That rule came into being because of the countless disruptive noisy guests who shattered the silence of an otherwise quiet neighborhood.

Helping with the enforcement is Host Compliance, which was hired by the city to find violators and take complaints. The 24/7 hot line (530.542.7474) is live. The company also monitors rental ad activity and transient occupancy tax collections.

Maureen Stuhlman, who oversees VHRs for the city, told the council Host Compliance has revolutionized how she and others are able to manage the short-term rentals. She showed a slide of the city with dots all over indicating that on April 17 1,072 VHRs with ads were compliant, while 319 were non-compliant. Staff is then able to use that data to track down the owners because Host Compliance has provided the addresses.

As of April 6, the city had 1,396 active VHR permits.