

Letter: Questioning how best to deal with VHRs

By Brandie Jordan Griffith

Will SCA's VHR initiative be the answer for South Lake Tahoe?

By now most have heard of the initiative sponsored by the Sustainable Community Alliance (SCA) which calls for maintaining regulation while making some minor changes to the current code. I appreciate that people keep bringing items to the table for consideration and their initiative has a few items worth expanding on. I see they are focused on finding a solution to the VHR crisis, but what I see lacking is a focus on the community as a whole.

I am not afraid to throw bad ideas around (I have plenty) as sometimes you need a few bad ones to come up with a great one. I won't pretend to thoroughly understand the implications of each change, but a few of the items listed in the SCA's initiative have me questioning.

My biggest concern (not addressed in the measure) is a lack of sustainable infrastructure. Over the last decade our tourism count has grown by leaps and bounds, but the roads haven't. At times it is a wonder how we can handle the person/car count that pours into the basin on any given weekend. The roads into Tahoe have not been adjusted to handle the traffic that currently plagues us. This is evidenced every Sunday when the mass exodus commences and is most painful in the winter when weather is present. On numerous occasions I was held hostage in my vehicle for hours while trying to get from the Y to Meyers. Side streets were as bad if not worse due to Google Maps. Most people know that you just don't leave the house on Sundays but not everyone has a choice. One would expect some traffic and that is one of the inconveniences of living in a

beautiful tourist destination, but the amount of traffic that we had to deal with was just wrong on every level. South Lake Tahoe was not designed to accommodate the number of tourists that we have allowed to come. We need to do a negative impact study that calls for an emphasis on fire and safety. South Lake Tahoe has become over-touristed.

Worth noting is the amount of energy, expense and manpower that it takes to clean up after the numbers. I hear an outcry for beach cleanup already, but it is not just the beaches that need extra attention ... it's the informal sledding hills, roadways, parking lots and food establishments. We need all hands on deck after every major holiday and three-day weekend.

Part of being a "Sustainable Community Alliance" is focusing on issues that are concerning to the residents and to the area in general. If we are to come to a peaceful agreement regarding VHRs, then there are larger issues that need to be addressed, not just parking and noise. It is difficult to see anything "sustained" in this initiative other than cash flow produced for and from vacation rentals.

How do we trust that City Council can assemble a fair committee that would focus on the needs of the community while regulating VHR, especially when this measure makes declaration for two of those members to be VHR owners? It seems that council is failing on most levels to follow the suggestions of any committee they appoint, so what will make this committee effective? It is reasonable to think that the panel will have some influence on council and their decisions, so it is of utmost importance that said panel be unbiased. Yeah, good luck with that.

Suggestions regarding occupancy are a step in the right direction. Less people, less problems, less cars and less impact=good ... and it is admirable that they have made provisions for prohibiting use of noise-related equipment and permanently prohibiting issuance of licenses to VHRs caught

operating without a permit. Although it looks good on paper, it is of little importance to the family living next door to a VHR that loses sleep every weekend from hot tub parties and general noise.

The measure also requires the city to create and provide VHR operators with a pamphlet of conduct that is distributed to all VHR occupants. I believe that the pamphlet approach has failed miserably in most arenas ... no one reads them and people still don't think the rules apply to them.

Another item that this measure moves to do is forbid the renewal of a VHR permit should the operator not generate \$1,500 of TOT during their 12-month licensing period. I believe this to be the most opportunistic component of the entire initiative. This guarantees that mega renters will stay in business (let's not try and call it anything else, because that is what it is) while the lower volume mom-and-pop type rentals will be forced to rent more days in order to keep up with the new requirements. So, essentially it will force the little guy out and create a more elite rental society. The city is already giving preferential treatment and issuing VHR permits to new McMansion construction (Herbert) that hasn't even passed inspection yet.

This cancels out the occupancy reduction effort because now smaller VHRs have to rent more to keep up. More nights rented, more people, more problems, more cars and more impact.

Would people be more inclined to support this measure if it had any meat on the bone? For instance, how about phasing out a percentage over time to reduce the number of rentals to a more manageable number... say cut it down near 30 percent to 1,000? Cap the county where they are at and keep them under that number? How about instead of a "pamphlet" we implement a standardized terms and conditions rental agreement that is from the city of SLT? In this agreement, they either e-sign or hard sign the contract and provide an "incident deposit" at

the time of rental to be refunded when they check out without citation. If there is a citation issued, they simply do not get their deposit back and it goes directly to the city. No different than a damage deposit on a rental car. People will comply more often if there is a real threat of cost.

Should the initiative pass, what about putting five residents from the community that are not associated with VHR in any other way than living amongst them? At that point the threat of a ban would be gone and the residents would have a much more realistic and proactive approach, given some time to accept the situation.

Finally, the initiative requests a five-member special VHR committee to make recommendations to City Council regarding allocation of some TOT to housing programs. Do we really need another committee for this and what housing programs are they referring to? This does not make clear who, what, how much ... but again it looks good on paper.

And about those long-term tenants that are worse. They have been around forever and they aren't going anywhere. If we see a rental that lacks a minimum standard in cleanliness, etc., shouldn't we as residents be calling them in to the city? A possible motion on the owners to get the yard cleaned up? Or is more productive running around snapping photos and then posting them on Facebook? If the owner of the long-term rental gets a notice to clean it up and doesn't, then we should be sending Clean Tahoe over there to do it for them, followed by a bill for services rendered. If they don't pay the bill, they get a lien. Of course, not all long-term renters are the problem, especially when it is their wallets that are open during slow season, supporting local businesses.

This is not a pro or anti-VHR platform. I am pro community, pro peaceful enjoyment of property, pro sustainability. This community has the ability to come together when it matters. A thank you is in order for the Realtors and VHR/business owners

took time to put something together and I am sure that they believe it will make a difference in bringing a peaceful co-existence. Should it pass, I hope that they are right.

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