

S. Lake Tahoe council to restructure VHR fines

By Kathryn Reed

The South Lake Tahoe City Council on Tuesday acknowledged its fees for some vacation home rental infractions are astronomical.

The \$1,000 parking fine levied against the renter and owner is expected to be reduced to \$250, and both may not be fined in the future.

The 75 percent reduction in large part came about because of the negative national media exposure the fines garnered.

“The chamber and LTVA have received numerous complaints because of the national publicity. People are not coming,” Steve Teshara, executive director of Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, told the council May 15. He said the city’s policies are already having a serious financial impact. “It will take some time to unring the bell on the negative publicity.”

Attorney Sergio Rudin with the law firm of Burke, Williams and Sorensen was directed to bring back a resolution on June 5 with revised fees for VHR infractions. Any changes agreed to by the council would take effect immediately, so before the summer crowds arrive.

“I am sickened we are seen as a community not welcoming to tourists,” Mayor Wendy David said.

Rudin advised the council not to make changes to the existing VHR ordinance (the fees are separate from that document) because of the pending VHR ballot initiative that could face voters in November. Rudin’s law firm says it would tie the

council's hands when it comes to being able to make changes to the ordinance, and that future changes would have to go to the voters. In essence it freezes the ordinance as it stands today.

Lake Tahoe News asked Rudin why not have the council make changes it wants and let those rules be the law of the land until such time any ballot initiative affecting it is approved. Rudin said that would be up to the council to decide, but said his advice was to keep the ordinance as is until the initiative process is complete.

As for parking, it has become the No. 1 VHR complaint. Noise used to have that distinction.

Maureen Stuhlman, who oversees the short-term rentals for the city, said the parking issue is leading to vigilantism. She said people calling in parking issues use it as a way to get a strike on a VHR owner, not because there was a disturbance.

Stuhlman said one person called in to report six vehicles that violated the city's ordinance. They could do so because they were driving around looking for violators. She said another person got a citation because he opted to park on the street – a no-no per the city ordinance – instead of waking his friends up to move cars around to allow him to park on the property. He thought staying on the street would be less disturbing to the neighbors than starting up a bunch of cars in the middle of the night.

Many of the calls are frivolous, a word Councilman Jason Collin used. He questioned if this is the best use of city resources.

Police Chief Brian Uhler asked for flexibility in the street parking issue as long as the visitors didn't exceed the number of vehicles allowed. Council gave consensus.

Also brought up at the meeting was how home owners'

associations were supposed to be able to make some of their own rules. Councilman Austin Sass seemed most perplexed by this revelation. It showed not everyone read the final version of the ordinance that they voted on.

The resolution with more details is expected to be on the June 5 agenda.