

# Douglas County strengthening VHR regulations

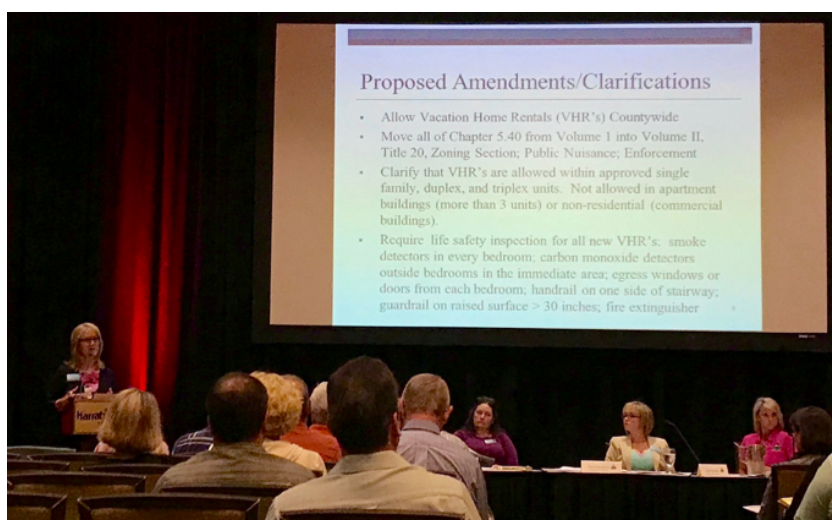
By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Douglas County is putting some teeth into its short-term rental ordinance in an effort to curtail problems and bring more oversight to the issue.

County officials came up with the ordinance and are just now engaging the public. The plan is for the ordinance to go for a vote by the Board of Commissioners in August.

June 18 was the first opportunity for residents and others to ask county staff questions, offer suggestions and give advice on the draft ordinance. Twenty people spoke during the three-hour meeting at Harrah's Lake Tahoe. Staff said adjustments will be made based on public feedback.

A few issues are still being worked out, which is where public testimony is critical. One item that was brought up Monday was whether bear boxes will be mandated in the Carson Valley. The county hasn't decided.



Mimi Moss, left, explains Douglas County's draft VHR ordinance. Photo/LTN

Many comments centered on whether homeowners' associations because the county's rules will in some ways supersede the HOA rules. Mary Anne Martin, deputy district attorney, said the county will consider what the HOA wants, but the county will make its decision based on its rules. Owners will then have to contend with the HOA separately.

Still, it was a much quieter, more respectful gathering on June 18 compared to meetings in South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County. It helped that there was not a time limit for people to talk so people had the opportunity to say everything they wanted. Plus, not a single elected official was at the front table. It was reps from planning, code enforcement and the District Attorney's Office who led the meeting, with Host Compliance also there. Also allowed was some dialogue with audience members after the formal comment period ended in order to get questions fully answered, and new comments to be voiced.

While a few regulations will be similar to what South Lake Tahoe has adopted, Douglas County officials more than once said they don't want to be unfriendly like its neighbor to the west. Some of those who spoke also belittled what the city has done, including limiting the number of VHRs that are allowed.

The county in its paperwork made a point of saying what the ordinance won't do. It won't limit the number of VHRs, it won't mirror South Lake Tahoe's regulations and it won't allow grandfathering of a VHR.

Part of the code change takes the VHR ordinance out of Business and Revenue and puts it into Zoning/Planning. This allows penalties and fines to be issued.

The number of fines and revocations to date has been low because there has been little recourse based on how things are currently written. Going forward it's likely the fine will be \$250/day if the owner is out of compliance, with a maximum of

\$10,000. Unpermitted vacation home rentals would face a \$500 fine per day.

Parking will be restricted to on-site for overnight. The county will not be enforcing daytime parking. Ninety-eight percent of complaints are parking, according to the county.

Occupancy will be changed from two per bedroom plus four to two per bedroom plus two. This was a bone of contention for many in attendance because people believe their house can accommodate more than the proposed rule without it being an issue.

“We believe if we curtail that number, it takes care of some of the problem of overcrowding in the residence,” Mimi Moss with the county said. Building code already has two per bedroom.

Josh Priou with Lake Tahoe Accommodations said the occupancy change would affect 30 percent of their rentals, which could equate to a decrease of \$135,000 in transient occupancy tax for the county on an annual basis because of the need to lower the nightly rental fee.

All new permits and renewals will require a life safety inspection, which has been going on for the last 2½ months. The VHR permit fee will go from \$100 to \$250, with renewals increasing \$125 to \$200.

Hot tub use won't be allowed between 10pm and 8am.

One way the county will be able to enforce the rules is by hiring Host Compliance, a Bay Area firm that since 2010 has been helping jurisdictions find rentals – permitted and not, offer a complaint hot line and provide data. This is the same company South Lake Tahoe and Truckee use.

Ulrik Binzer with Host Compliance said the short-term rental market has grown 800 percent since 2011. When his company

started there were 16 websites that were regularly patrolled. Now there are 50, with those targeting 90 percent of the portals where people list their homes.

His stats show there are 1,272 unique rental units in Douglas County, with 90 percent in the Tahoe area. The median nightly rate is \$295. Ninety percent are entire house rentals.

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**Notes:**

- Future meetings:

July 10, 9am – Douglas County Planning Commission, CVIC Hall, Minden

Aug. 2, 10am – Board of Commissioners, CVIC Hall, Minden

Aug. 16, 1:30pm – Board of Commissioners, Harrah's Lake Tahoe

Sept. 6, 10am – Board of Commissioners, Minden (optional meeting if first and second readings are not taken care of in August)

- Draft ordinance is **online**.