S. Tahoe looking to tweak vacation rental rules

By Kathryn Reed

It depends who you talk to if there is a problem with vacation rentals in South Lake Tahoe. Some houses just seem to attract loud guests. Others are a welcome addition to neighborhoods. All may have their regulations tweaked soon.

The City Council on Nov. 18 engaged in another round of discussions about the ordinance that has been in place since 2003 and that was updated in 2011.

Noise is the No. 1 issue, with trash and parking the other major concerns.

There are 1,544 licensed vacation home rentals in the city limits, with the bulk – 316 – in the Tahoe Keys.

In the first nine months of this year there were 158 noise complaints from these rentals. That is down from 468 in 2013. Vacation home rentals account for 25 percent of the noise complaints the police department receives.

But not everyone believes this is an accurate number. Even Mayor Hal Cole said he believes the numbers are higher based on what he is told by residents.

“I think the numbers are underrepresented from personal experience,” Councilman-elect Austin Sass said. “I was told by dispatch that code enforcement wasn’t working at night and officers were busy. I think people stop calling when they hear this.”

Sass was one of 10 members of the public to speak at the Tuesday meeting.

Josh Priou with Lake Tahoe Accommodations called the number of complaints “minor”. He said his company booked 6,900 nights in those nine months, which accounts for 15 percent of the market. He added that citywide there would have been about 46,000 rental nights. Lake Tahoe Accommodations didn’t receive a complaint in that time period.

Priou said there will always be jerks, and added that the teeth in the ordinance is the threat of suspension or revocation of the permit.

Police Chief Brian Uhler, whose department oversees the permitting and enforcement of these rentals, suggested the word “overnight” be removed from the ordinance. The ordinance now limits the number of overnight guests, but not how many can be there during the day. Doing so could also alleviate some parking problems.

City Attorney Tom Watson said the legalities of doing so would have to be investigated.

A representative with Lake Tahoe Getaways said, “Guests need to have skin in the game.” In other words, cite them, not just the owner.

Noise from people in hot tubs late at night is an issue. Uhler suggested finding a way to turn off the jets at a certain hour so people would not be raising their voices to talk above them.

Others proposed if that is a constant source of the noise problem, then possibly the hot tub needs to be removed.

Also proposed was a sliding scale for the permit fee based on number of rooms as well if it is operated by an agency or owner.

Requiring bear boxes was briefly touched on, but more talk was focused on whether South Tahoe Refuse could add a route for

these rentals.

Adding an enforcement officer to possibly work Thursday-Sunday nights was also broached.

The vacation home rental issue is expected to return to the council in late January or early February for action. Tuesday’s item was discussion only.