

Letter: Irritated with VHRs in South Tahoe

To the community,

I've received the city's notice of a Vacation Home Rental Application for 3861 Saddle Road, Unit 12. I oppose this.

Vacation rentals are like the city's SnowGlobe festival: both are fine ideas under the right circumstances, but terrible ideas when placed in residential neighborhoods. This puts conflicting interests in proximity, a group with short-term interests in having a good time without concern for noise, the environment, or neighbors against the goals of residents, with long-term hopes for a livable neighborhood and maybe just a night's sleep.

Permitting these activities shows an appalling willingness to put the financial interests of non-residents and businesses ahead of the well-being of those who live in South Lake Tahoe. This is justified as promotion of "economic development", favored buzzwords of City Council and the city manager. This is either a misunderstanding of the United States Constitution, or a perversion of it. The Constitution describes the purpose of government simply, right in the preamble. It's union, justice, domestic tranquility, defense, promotion of general welfare and liberty. There is nothing there about allowing rentals to trash neighborhoods, or enough noise to break windows. It's about people. There is no mention of money.

Recently City Council has started surveys and discussed possible restrictions on vacation rentals. I'd like to describe a few of my own experiences with city code enforcement in the 14 years I've lived in an area of South Lake Tahoe with VHR properties:

I've probably complained five or six times about noise. The city response has been zero.

I complained once about 25 people crammed into one house. The city response came five days later. There was no problem, the house was empty.

On two occasions I've asked city police driving by to please ticket cars parked on the streets forcing snowplows to go around them, meaning the street was never cleared. Both times the reply was no, that the city didn't want to ticket tourists and possibly degrade their local vacation experience.

Worst of all, on one occasion a local VHR had a plumbing malfunction resulting in days of raw sewage flushed directly on to the ground. The city responded to a complaint by calling the VHR owner, who blamed a contractor. This was relayed to me as resolution. Apparently it's OK as long as there is somebody to blame. A little sewage on the ground or maybe in the lake – so what. I got to clean it up. Multiple violations at this same rental have been ignored.

The sole city agency with any interest in quality of life issues seems to be Clean Tahoe, doing a fine job.

In summary, vacation rentals in residential neighborhoods are a bad idea. The city has demonstrated inability at regulation. The letterhead on the stationery I received containing the Notice Rental Application has the motto "making a positive difference now", so here is an opportunity. If the city cannot reverse a deteriorating quality of life for residents, I urge an end to vacation rentals in residential neighborhoods.

Joshua Benin, South Lake Tahoe