

# More talk, no action on VHRs in S. Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Because the rules on the books have never been fully enforced, it's impossible to know if they are even effective. So it goes with vacation home rentals in South Lake Tahoe.

Another three-hour discussion about the issue took place at the July 11 City Council meeting. At the end of the day the electeds decided to talk some more.

The VHR subcommittee of the mayor and mayor pro tem is being resurrected. They will meet with stakeholders and bring back ideas to the full council.

Items to be considered include:

- Limiting the number of VHRs. If this is agreed to, then they must create the parameters for doing so.
- How many citations a rental may be served before it threatens the owner's right to have a permit.
- Whether owners should be cited when renters are the problem.
- Whether an owner occupied rental should come under the same VHR regulations; and whether that is even legal.
- Possibly mandating renters have to get the key from someone in person.
- Having uniform language for regulations that all guests in the city sign.

The workshop came on the heels of the \$77,000 socio-economic study that was released this spring. Hardly anyone brought up

that document.

What people care about is what's happening in their neighborhoods, what the city might do to curtail VHRs, and the impacts – good and bad – those decisions would have.

City staff is backing the idea of limiting the number of VHRs. This decision will ultimately be up to the council. There is not consensus for the status quo (unlimited VHRs anywhere) or a limit of some kind.

What wasn't explained is how a cap would solve any of the problems. Noise, parking and trash remain the top three complaints.

Twenty-six members of the public spoke at Tuesday's meeting. Beliefs and feelings were all over the board – from wanting to ban VHRs from residential areas, to keeping things as they are. One person broached the idea of taking the issue to the voters.

Enforcement was the common theme throughout the afternoon.

It's not like this should be news to anyone who has been following the topic. Enforcement, or lack thereof, has been the overriding issue for years.

Those in the industry believe the rules are OK as they are written today. They, too, want guests to obey the law and for officers to hold people accountable. This, ideally, would show those being bothered by short-term renters that someone cares and is doing something about it. It would perhaps mean less of a black-eye for an industry that seems to have a tarnished image.

Since June 30 the city has been posting citations on its **website**. As of Monday morning there were 74 incidents.

Police Chief Brian Uhler said he wants to do away with warnings and go straight to citations.

About 14 percent of South Lake Tahoe homeowners have a VHR permit.

The economic impact of VHRs is undeniable, and was driven home in the study. This is a big business. The city relies on the transient occupancy tax, homeowners are making bank, the people in the industry (rental companies, maids, handymen and the like) rely on them for paychecks, and then there are all the companies that benefit from these people spending money at their establishments.