

SLT VHR initiative moves forward with more study

By Susan Wood

South Shore resident Jerry Goodman couldn't have said it better when it comes to opening up or closing the door to vacation home rentals. It feels "like Groundhog Day" in respect to a November ballot initiative that could change the face of the lake's only incorporated city.

No other issue can bring a massive reiteration of everything discussed and everything analyzed for years like this one. This time, a petition with a sufficient number of signatures for an all-out ban on VHRs in residential zones was received into record by the city. More than 1,100 signatures were needed to meet the 10 percent requirement of registered voters. The VHR opponents led by Ken Weitzman, Dan Brown and Peggy Bourland raked in 1,636 for what promises to be a blockbuster general election slated for Nov. 6.

So when the South Lake Tahoe City Council chose to issue another study to gauge the economic impact of the practice at its June 19 meeting, the issue prompted another round of opinions. The certification and request for a report due by July 17 was passed on a 3-0 vote. Councilman Tom Davis abstained, and Councilman Jason Collin missed another meeting.

The issue is so full of acrimony; some speakers didn't wait for the agenda item to arrive. Instead, they expressed their opinions over public commentary and during a discussion about the establishment of VHR fines. The latter has come under fire as South Lake Tahoe's \$1,000 parking fine made national headlines.

Property manager Josh Priou called the level of fine "insane," inferring the amount of negative national publicity could

certainly dwarf any gain by assessing these fines.

"People don't want to walk around on eggshells while on vacation," Priou said.

The fines ranging from \$50 to \$1,000 depending on the violation passed, but will return without the "and/or" language on five line items.

Tuesday's meeting with dual agenda items on vacation home rentals brought out mostly stakeholders ranging from VHR workers at property management firms to homeowners renting rooms.

Airbnb host Debbie Norton was in tears as she pleaded with the council to find a way to maintain her source of income and reason for hope amid being disabled.

"Please do not ban VHRs," she said.

Other meetings over the last few years have been dominated by residents' complaints over disruptions by rowdy, inconsiderate tourists.

It's no wonder elected bodies like this one are having to deal with the dilemma of making tax dollars in the millions from people renting their homes while trying to keep the peace. It's a delicate balance at best.

When all is said and done, VHRs' existence will be headed to the ballot box, as Councilman Austin Sass reminded the citizenry.

"We understand your passion," Sass told the speakers "imploring" the panel to can the ban. He urged them to vote.

"It's going to the ballot," he said.

In other business, the council:

- Chose to meet with El Dorado County to discuss a 51.7

percent increase in fees reapportioned to the city in order to sustain ancillary services relative to animal control.

- Considered a policy to rename city streets, prompted by a request by South Tahoe Refuse General Manager Jeff Tillman to labeling a roadway after South Shore philanthropist Lisa Maloff.