EDC taking its time to revamp VHR ordinance



Supervisors Mike Ranalli and Sue Novasel, standing, talk VHRs on April 12. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – At the rate El Dorado County supervisors are dealing with vacation home rentals, it's possible some of them won't even be in office before a full ordinance comes up for a vote.

It was more of the same at the most recent meeting on April 12. Supervisors Sue Novasel and Mike Ranalli, who make up the VHR ad hoc committee, and county staff talked and talked; then there were sheets of white paper for the public comment; then those who were still left sitting in the magnet school's multipurpose room were able to ask questions and express the same concerns they voice every meeting.

Those who are subjected to unruly tourists are fed up and want action now. Those who advocate for these types of rentals worry about what some consider Draconian regulations.

The county has been gathering information about other jurisdictions. Issues being studied include whether events are allowed, quiet hours, limiting overnight guests, having a local contract, fines for owners and renters, and notifying neighbors about a VHR.

The county has an ordinance for short-term rentals for the unincorporated area of the Tahoe basin, but is looking to expand it to the West Slope. The Camino area, which is home to Apple Hill, is the main area with similar issues to Tahoe.

What was disclosed Thursday is the number of permits countywide:

- November 2017 – 727 active permits, 29 in the process
- March 2018 – 766 active, 46 in process
- April 12 – 822 active, 18 in process.

It was noted that whatever changes take place, like the potential of having inspections, this will pertain to future and existing rentals. Having everyone follow the same rules means there is no getting in now to avoid new regulations.

For now, the county is not talking about a moratorium, but it isn't completely off the table.

According the presentation this week, the goal is to develop a "set of modernized policies and enforcement methods that retain the benefits of VHRs, prevents or mitigates the impact on neighborhoods, and minimizes their impact on public services." The objectives are to "improve neighborhood compatibility and avoid overconcentration of VHRs and commercialization of neighborhoods."

What was stressed by the electeds is that enforcement is the critical piece. They don't want to approve regulations that cannot be enforced.

From July 1, 2017, through March 5, 2018, the county assessed 154 penalties countywide for VHR and transient occupancy tax violations. The cash collected was approximately $37,000, which includes interest.

Increased penalties and fees are something the county is considering. Today the application fee for a VHR permit is $89. This compares to South Lake Tahoe where the fee is more than $400, with an inspection fee close to $150.

The county is looking to have fire districts do the inspections, not building inspectors.

"We have to talk about how we would pay for it," Lake Valley Fire Chief Tim Alameda told *Lake Tahoe News*. He attended the latter portion of Thursday's meeting. He added, "We did a dry run with a couple properties." His people were looking for "health and life safety types of things."

The county has had an online survey out for a while asking a variety of questions regarding vacation rentals.

Sue Hennike with the County Administrative Office went over some of the results. Noise was the biggest complaint, with the problem time from 10pm to 2am. However, 40 percent of respondents said noise is never an issue.

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Notes:

· This is the **existing ordinance** which only pertains to the unincorporated area of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

· Ad hoc committee meetings:

o April 23 – meeting in Placerville from 5:30-7:30pm to discuss expanding rules to West Slope.

o May 9 – meeting in Tahoe from 5:30-7:30pm to talk about parking, traffic and other issues.

o June 11 – Placerville meeting from 5:30-7:30pm.

o July 26 – Tahoe meeting from 5:30-7:30pm.

· Full board of supes to meet in Tahoe on May 2, 6pm at South Tahoe Middle School. VHRs will be the sole topic. Eight recommended changes to the VHR ordinance will be considered then.

Researchers trying to turn carbon into things they can sell

By Jim Polson, Bloomberg

What if the billions of tons of carbon dioxide pumped out by the world's power plants could be converted into something that's more useful? Ten teams will split $5 million to test ways to do just that.

The researchers are developing systems that break down the greenhouse gases to make products ranging from building materials to plastics to chemical feedstocks. They were all named as finalists in the NRG COSIA Carbon XPrize competition, during a session at the BNEF Future of Energy Summit in New York.

The goal is an economically viable system to convert emissions from power plants into commercial product.

Read the whole story

Plan to split Calif. into 3 states may qualify for ballot

By Eric Ting, San Francisco Chronicle

Californians may get to vote on a plan to split the state into three smaller states this November.

Venture capitalist Tim Draper, who previously pushed a proposal that would split California into six states, says that his three-state proposal has enough signatures to qualify for the November ballot.

On Thursday, Draper said in a statement that the “CAL 3” initiative has collected over 600,000 signatures from Californians who would like to see the state split into three. An initiative needs 366,000 signatures to appear on the ballot.

Read the whole story

Caltrans picks up tons of trash in region

Caltrans is joining forces with state and local agencies, and volunteers across the state to increase public awareness on the volume and cost associated with removing trash along state highways and neighborhood streets as well as in public parks and beaches.

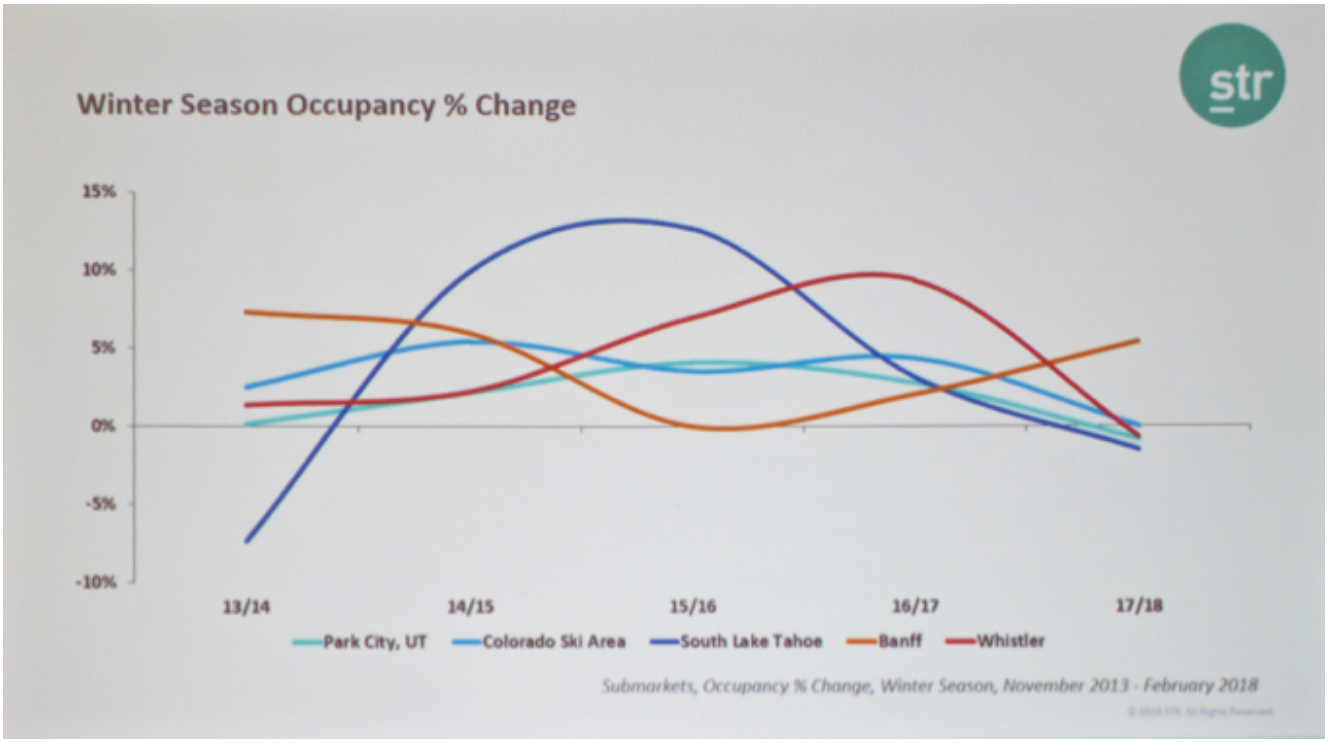
Caltrans District 3 maintenance crews spent Wednesday and Thursday working along highways in Chico, Sacramento, Truckee, Yolo County and Nevada County, collecting 2 tons of old tires and more than 80 cubic yards of litter and debris, enough to fill more than six dump trucks.

Highway litter ranks as the No. 1 complaint by motorists.

Last year, Caltrans District 3 maintenance and Adopt-A-Highway volunteers collected 7,418 cubic yards of trash strewn along 13,314 shoulder miles in Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Sierra, Sutter, Yuba, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, El Dorado and Yolo counties.

Statewide, Caltrans spent nearly $70 million on litter removal, collecting enough litter, trash and debris from freeways to fill more than 42 Olympic size swimming pools.

Expert: Hotel occupancy at record high



Data from STR analytics firm shows hotel occupancy changes for five winter destinations. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Hotel occupancy in the United States is at the highest level it has ever achieved – 66 percent.

Ali Hoyt, senior director of consulting analytics for Denver based STR, was one of the presenters this week at the annual Mountain Travel Symposium. She provided a wealth of information about the hotel industry in the U.S., while briefly touching on metrics for ski towns. The firm studies 647 markets in the U.S., with properties divided into different classes. STR covers more than 70 percent of the hotels in the country, which is about 5 million rooms.

The symposium, now in its 43rd year, is the largest trade show of its kind. This is the first time the South Shore has hosted the weeklong event. It has been on the North Shore before and will return to Squaw Valley in 2020.

Hotel occupancy records have been breaking since 2016, with 2018 continuing in that direction.

“Demand is still outpacing supply. We expect that to level off,” Hoyt said during her April 12 talk.

The growth rate is about 2 percent year-over-year, which is about half of what it was in 2014 and 2015.

What her company does not track is vacation rentals. STR is only collecting data on hotels.

The hotel industry has experienced eight consecutive years of revPAR growth. This is the revenue per available room. Hotels will multiply their average daily rate by the occupancy rate to get the revPAR number.

What Hoyt and her colleagues are finding is the revPAR growth will be driven by rate growth.

The lackluster snowfall this winter has caused the local revPAR and occupancy numbers to be all over the map.

While it’s obvious the only way hotels will make money is if heads are in beds, it also matters what price they get per night. Much like the airline industry, it’s not a consistent price. The same bed on the same floor of a hotel could have a different price based on when it was booked and where it was booked. And it could be more expensive based on the day of week, events going on as well as holidays.

The money collected then has a huge impact on the city or county it resides because of the hotel taxes that are levied. The transient occupancy tax in a tourist area like Lake Tahoe is a huge revenue source for the city and counties in the basin.

When comparing the South Shore to Park City, Utah, Colorado ski areas, and the Canadian towns of Banff and Whistler, locally the occupancy rate had the wildest swing from 2013 to now.

While the whole Lake Tahoe basin, including Truckee, is busier

in summer than winter, that is not true of most ski towns.

Hoyt's data, though, is showing occupancy rates are growing in other destinations. Average daily rates and revPAR are going up, but it's a bit of a roller coaster for all locations. Still, she sees summer bookings as an opportunity for hotels in terms of increasing occupancy and revenue.

Understanding the 'new normal' for water in the West

By Tara Lohan, Water Deeply

April is often a time of abundance in the mountains of the American West, when snowpack is at or near its peak, and forecasters work to determine how much runoff will course through our rivers and fill reservoirs later in the season.

This year, across much of the West, particularly the Southwest, there's little in the way of abundance. At Lake Powell, the second-largest reservoir in the West, runoff is predicted to be only 43 percent of average. Arizona is looking at one of its lowest runoff years in history. And in New Mexico, stretches of the Rio Grande have already run dry, months ahead of normal.

The only consolation is that last year was a wet year and reservoirs received a boost. While it's typical in the West to have big swings in precipitation from year to year, what has concerned scientists lately is that even good years are no longer producing the kind of runoff seen historically.

Read the whole story

STPUD schedules meetings regarding budget

The South Tahoe Public Utility District board of directors will be having a meeting May 3 from 6-7:30pm about the next fiscal budget.

It will be in the board room at 1275 Meadow Crest Drive, South Lake Tahoe.

The purpose of the meeting is to review the proposed 2018-19 budget, and 10-year financial and capital improvement plan for the district. No action will be taken.

The proposed budget will be voted on by the board on May 17 at 2pm at the district office.

The public will be able to comment at both meetings.

Mold found at former Stateline school

Mold found at the former Kingsbury Middle School site has put what officials hope is only a minor obstacle into the process of selling the parcel.

“The board adopted a resolution (April 10) which authorized me to work with our buyer to address the findings of mold in the building. We hope to have those negotiations tied up this week

and move forward with the sale," DCSD Superintendent Teri White told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The Douglas County School District board first voted to put the 22-acre site on the market in January 2012.

In January, the district entered an agreement with a **Bay Area firm** to buy the property and buildings for $3.75 million.

The empty 36,000-square-foot former Kingsbury Middle School in Stateline is costing the district between $10,000 and $15,000 a month to ensure the alarm is on, pipes don't freeze and other basics are taken care of.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Plastics found in organic fertilizer from food waste

By Christopher Joyce, NPR

Tiny particles of plastic are showing up all over the world, floating in the ocean, buried in soil, in food and even in beer. Now there's new research that's found microplastics in fertilizer – organic fertilizer from food waste, in fact.

Collecting food waste to make fertilizer is a big deal in parts of Europe and is catching on in the U.S. But Ruth Freitag, a chemist at the University of Bayreuth in Germany, says there's a problem.

"What happens most of the time is that people don't like to

put garbage into the bin as it is. They like to wrap it up," she says – usually in a plastic bag. Freitag says some of the contamination also comes from plastic food wrappers as well; she can tell by the type of plastic they find.

Read the whole story

Wirth out as president of Squaw-Alpine resorts



Andy Wirth’s tenure as president of Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadow is over. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

Andy Wirth is no longer at the helm of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts.

Wirth has been a polarizing figure in the Olympic Valley and greater Lake Tahoe-Truckee areas.

Why exactly the 54-year-old abruptly left has not been disclosed. A statement by Wirth issued by the resort called it a retirement. “It is after careful consideration and

reflection that I have made this decision. My retirement will allow me to not only spend more time with my family, but focus on some of my passions, including the active support of wounded warriors and environmental causes – advocacy and action."

Wirth did not return *Lake Tahoe News'* phone call.

He could have easily decided to step away after nearly dying in an October 2013 skydiving accident that ripped off most of his right arm, causing extensive bleeding.

Wirth has been leading Squaw since August 2010, when he was appointed to be president after Nancy Cushing stepped down from that role. She had been president since 1994, but was running the entire resort after her husband, Alex, died in 2006. It was Alex Cushing who brought the Winter Olympics to the resort in 1960.

KSL Capital Partners of Colorado bought Squaw in November 2010 and kept Wirth on board. Since then, Alpine Meadows has come under the same ownership umbrella.

In April 2017, KSL partnered with Aspen Skiing to buy Intrawest Resort Holdings' six resorts, and then went on a buying spree that included Deer Valley in Utah and Mammoth in California. The new company, named Alterra Mountain Company, kept Wirth on as the leader of Squaw-Alpine.

While Wirth described himself as an environmentalist, environmental groups saw him as the enemy. This largely has to do with him being the mouthpiece for KSL's plans to spend $1 billion over 25 years to build more than 1,000 residential units, hotels, retail, restaurants and bars, and an indoor adventure center.

Lawsuits have been filed regarding that project.

Then there is the controversial proposal to build a **gondola**

that would link Squaw and Alpine on the outskirts of Granite Chief Wilderness Area.

Deaths and accidents, while part of the reality of the ski industry, have also plagued the resort during Wirth's tenure, with some questioning safety and how incidents are handled.

Wirth has also overseen millions of dollars in improvements, mostly at Squaw. His leadership has also brought in a more customer service oriented approach to dealing with guests. He was also instrumental in bringing the **World Cup** back to Squaw in 2017.

In the interim, Ron Cohen, Alterra's deputy general counsel, will serve as president and COO in Wirth's place. David Perry, Alterra's president and COO, will also be having more of a say regarding Squaw-Alpine until someone is hired to run the Tahoe resorts.