

CHANGES STALL CRACKDOWN ON ROWDY RENTERS

By ***Dana M. Nichols***

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SAN ANDREAS - A month ago, a solid majority on the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors signaled it was ready to crack down on unruly vacation rentals that neighbors say make life miserable around Lake Tulloch. But somehow the ordinance never was adopted.

Instead, for the past two meetings, various supervisors have asked for changes that have pushed back any possible adoption date. That has Supervisor Darren Spellman, who formerly represented the area, worried it is all really a strategy to put off any crackdown until after rental owners have another year of raking in thousands of dollars a week from renting the lakefront homes. The most expensive on the lake rents for up to \$3,000 a night.

"This is something that has been plaguing the Tulloch area for many, many years," Spellman said.

On Jan. 22, the board voted 4-0, with Board Chairwoman Merita Callaway absent, to introduce an ordinance to crack down on the vacation rentals. If it had been formally adopted at a subsequent meeting, then the ordinance would have required vacation rental owners to get a permit and to risk losing it if unruly renters violate limits on noise, occupancy or parking.

Instead of adopting the measure at a later meeting, however, supervisors began asking for changes. Callaway, who was absent when it was first introduced, is particularly hostile to the proposed regulations.

Callaway's district on upper Highway 4 also is home to large numbers of vacation rental homes. Although the Tulloch ordinance was written to regulate only houses with access to the popular lake near Copperopolis, Callaway said she doesn't like the precedent it would set.

"Why do we say it is a business in Lake Tulloch and not in the rest of the county?" Callaway said, questioning the idea that vacation rental owners would be required to get a business permit in some locations but not others.

Callaway also said that homeowners associations have the power, if they wish, to limit vacation rentals.

Calaveras County Planning Director Rebecca Willis said Tulloch is different because the huge lakefront parties involving drunken boaters create unique problems.

"This is really about safety. This is really about protecting our residential neighborhoods," Willis said.

Supervisor Debbie Ponte, whose district includes Tulloch, and all the other supervisors except for Callaway indicated they still support the ordinance.

But Ponte led an effort to have revisions made that would give vacation rental owners more flexibility to justify filling the houses with more than the two people per bedroom proposed in the initial ordinance.

Staff will make that change and others before bringing the ordinance back for a reintroduction March 12. If successfully reintroduced and adopted later in March, the ordinance could still take effect before the next lakefront party season gets rolling in May.

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