

Board gets update on tourism; ponders short-term rental code

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A pair of tourism items were in the spotlight at last week's meeting of the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors.

The board received an update Jan. 28 from the Calaveras Visitors Bureau on its tourism promotion activities and began preliminary discussions on coming up with a short-term vacation rental ordinance.

Visitor spending in the county increased from \$258.1 million in 2022 to \$269.4 million in 2023, according to the presentation made by Jessica Johnson. Figures for 2024 will become available in April of this year.

The Visitors Bureau and Film Commission are funded by the transient occupancy (room) tax from visitor stays in the county and Angels Camp.

"We aim to keep our Transient Occupancy Tax totals as high as possible to help support public safety and market our incredible county," according to the CVB's mission statement.

Funds from the tax are divided among the sheriff's office, county fire districts, county public works and the CVB.

Johnson provided a breakdown of the tax going to the CVB with 63 percent going to its marketing efforts, 25 percent to payroll and 12 percent to overhead. Of the 63 percent going to marketing, 24 percent is for print ads, radio and the film commission, while 22 percent goes to production of the visitors guide and 21 percent to website, software subscriptions and Constant Contact. Another 18 percent is used for event promotion and social media, while 8 percent is for data tracking and 7 for media familiarity trips.

The great outdoors are Calaveras County's main attraction with visitors visits peaking in the months of June, July and August.

The CVB's 2025 Strategic Plan calls for continuing to "increase awareness locally, domestically and internationally of what Calaveras has to offer. Collaborate with local lodging partners and businesses to create programs and packages to encourage extended stays. Invest time and CVB funds in local events. Continue to look for innovative and successful ways to market the county." Local Realtors, property managers and short-term rental owners cautioned the board not to kill the county's tourism numbers when discussion turned to what a short-term rental ordinance should look like.

County staff last year was directed to develop a short-term vacation rental ordinance that would apply countywide. Currently, short-term rentals are only regulated in four subdivisions in the Lake Tulloch area through county code. A draft ordinance was prepared in the summer of 2024 and circulated for public comment in August and September.

Staff received a large number of comments that resulted in the need to reconsider the direction that the ordinance was being taken.

Some of the key concerns raised were:

- Can the county handle the proposed permit process in a timely manner considering that there are more than 700 STVRs registered with the tax collector for the collection of TOT?
- The local tourism industry, especially in the Arnold area, is reliant on vacationers who support local businesses. Would regulation of STVRs reduce or limit their availability?
- The occupancy limits proposed in the draft are too restrictive. (Two persons per bedroom plus two additional up to a maximum of 12 persons).
- The application process is too cumbersome.
- The notice and complaint information provided to neighbors is too intrusive and could be subject to abuse.

- More strict regulation and enforcement on noise is needed.

Board Chairman Martin Huberty, whose district includes Arnold and Murphys, said he believes the primary reason for such an ordinance should be to stress Safety. He would like the ordinance to address evacuation orders in events such as wildfires along the upper Highway 4 corridor, with visitors advised to leave when a warning is issued so residents will have a clearer path when a mandatory evacuation order comes down.

With input from last week's meeting, staff is going back to refine the proposed ordinance before it goes to the County Planning Commission for consideration and the Board of Supervisors for approval.