

La Quinta residents launch bid to get short-term vacation rentals out of residential neighborhoods



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A group of La Quinta residents kicked off a petition drive on Thursday to get a measure on the November ballot that would ask residents whether the city should phase out most short-term vacation rental properties in residential neighborhoods by Dec. 31, 2024.

More than 40 people attended a press conference held by representatives of “Neighbors for Neighborhoods La Quinta,” or N4N, at Civic Center, between the library and Wellness Center. Many were holding red and white signs that read: “Save Our Neighborhoods. Save Our City. Sign the Petition.”

“We want the ability to vote on this issue,” N4N member Edie Hylton said.

Some residents have said they are not satisfied with the city council’s actions, including higher permit fees, stricter penalties and fines for problem properties, and a ban on any new short-term vacation rental permits approved in April 2021, Hylton said.



Instead, they want to see short-term vacation rentals banned in residential neighborhoods.

“If we’re not happy with our leadership, then this is the process to make that happen,” Hylton said. The process to get on the ballot is not an easy one, she said.

But “it’s our right and it’s a democratic process to do it,” Hylton said.

The group hopes to collect 3,000 signatures by April 15, N4N organizer Don Shoffstall said.

They have until May 1 to collect the signatures for the November ballot, but want to give themselves extra time if needed, he said.

Only registered La Quinta voters can sign the petitions.

Shoffstall also put out a call for volunteers to help get the petitions signed, saying they have 80 days, which breaks down to about 35 signatures per day.

If passed by voters, the measure would allow short-term vacation rentals only in designated areas, such as those zoned tourist commercial, and in residential neighborhoods where the property owner remains on site throughout the rental.

“Let me be clear, we’re not against tourism,” Hylton said. “Tourism where zoned and managed is very appropriate and we want to see more of that in La Quinta.”

But they belong in “the right places,” she said.

In April 2021, following months of lengthy hearings and discussions, the City Council voted 4-1 to ban any new permits. The ban replaced a moratorium on new permits that had been in place since August 2020.

The council also raised permit fees and adopted stiffer fines and penalties, including a two-strikes rule that permanently bans an owner of a problem property or illegally run short-term rentals from the program.

The changes the council made to the city’s short-term rental ordinances were largely based on recommendations from staff, a citizen ad-hoc committee appointed by the council and a survey and report by Neighbors for Neighborhoods.

In December, staff reported that the stiffer penalties were working and complaints of noise, illegal parking and trash from short-term rentals had decreased substantially since July 2020, when the city saw a spike in complaints as the pandemic drove more people to vacation rentals.

The council also made permits non-transferrable, so when a property cannot continue as a short-term rental. As of Feb. 4, La Quinta has 1,158 active short-term vacation rental permits, down from 1,320 in January 2021.

Resident Kay Wolff said the ban on new permits can be overturned by the council at any time.



“So, we have to take action before the city repeals the ban...,” Wolff said.

Short-term vacation rentals, she said, take away homes that could be occupied by full-time residents.

“We have a housing shortage caused in large part by STVR conversions,” Wolff said.

While the number of complaints for noise, parking and trash have dropped “dramatically,” Wolff said, some of the most frequently mentioned complaints from residents — like loss of sleep, disrespect and trespassing — are not grounds for citations.

She pointed to other cities in the Coachella Valley that have moved away from short-term rentals in neighborhoods, including Palm Desert, which banned them in residential areas several years ago and Rancho Mirage which recently approved a ban on all STRs in the city.

“Virtually every city in the valley and across the state and the nation have grappled with enforcement,” Wolff said. “After years of tightening enforcement, all have found it is impossible to eliminate all problems from strangers spending a few nights next door.”

More information about the petition is available at neighborsforneighborhoodslq.org. The city also has short-term vacation rental information on its website, including a list of properties that currently have permits or where they have been suspended, at laquintaca.gov.

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