

La Quinta voters will decide fate of short-term rentals in residential neighborhoods in November



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Come November, La Quinta residents will get a say in whether short-term vacation rentals should be banned from residential neighborhoods.

A citizens group called La Quinta Neighbors for Neighborhoods, or N4N, successfully obtained enough signatures to get the initiative on the Nov. 8 ballot.

The group launched a petition drive in February and needed to obtain the signatures of at least 10% of La Quinta's 24,487 registered voters. The group collected 3,667 signatures and filed the petition with the City Clerk on April 21. It was sent on to the Riverside County Registrar of Voter's office which found that 3,244 signatures were valid – well above the 10% needed.

If passed by voters, the initiative would phase out short-term vacation rentals in residential neighborhoods by Dec. 31, 2024, allowing them only in home shares – where the property owner remains on site throughout the rental – and in designated areas, such as those zoned tourist commercial.



“Overnight renters are not neighbors. They are on vacation. Their attitude and behavior is different than a full-time residents,” Don Shoffstall, N4N organizer, told council members Tuesday.

“Are all renters bad? No. Are all renters good? No, and that’s the problem. These bad renters bring problems into our residential neighborhoods that full-time residents should not be asked to expect or tolerate,” Shoffstall said. “We believe the petition will make La Quinta more desirable for families and tourists.”

N4N was started in October 2020 when the pandemic drove up the use of short-term vacation rentals, which also brought an increase in complaints about noise, parking, trash and other issues from residents.

In response, the council approved a moratorium on new short-term rental permits in August 2020 that last year was turned into a permanent ban.

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 rental from the program. The changes were largely based on recommendations from staff, a citizen ad-hoc committee appointed by the council and a survey and report by N4N.

Permits were also made non-transferrable.

The city currently has 1,163 active short-term vacation rental permits, down from 1,320 in January 2021, due to attrition related to home sales and non-renewals.

Compliance has improved, city officials say. Complaints peaked in the first quarter of 2021 when the city had 348 complaints and had declined by nearly 76% to 85 in the fourth quarter, city staff reported to the council in March.

City revenues from short-term rentals were estimated at nearly \$7.2 million in 2021, \$5.9 million of which came from transient occupancy taxes, according to a March report to the council.

The City Council's unanimous adoption of a resolution accepting the registrar's validation of signatures and vote to put it on the November ballot followed more than two hours of public comments on Tuesday – most coming from supporters of short-term vacation rentals urging the council not to ban them.



“If STVRs are banned, it doesn’t mean people are going to stop illegally renting,” short-term vacation property owner Eddie Estrada said, leaving the city with more problems than exist today.

Others told council members that doing away with the program would impact the local economy, costing jobs of not only those who clean and maintain vacation rental properties, but restaurants, stores and other businesses vacationers visit.

Kathleen Dwyer, a PGA West resident, said she doesn’t own a short-term rental but supports having them, saying revenues from the program help pay for police and fire and other services.

“Without the revenues ... the city will either have to raise our taxes or cut our services,” she said and urged the council to reject the proposed ballot measure.

Shoffstall and others who support the initiative said if it passes, it is not a ban on short-term rentals as they will still be allowed where permitted by zoning.

Council members said what was before them was not a request that they ban short-term rentals, but approval for the ballot initiative that lets the voters decide.

“I’m in favor of putting this in front of the voters,” Mayor Pro Tem Kathleen Fitzpatrick said. “This has been a long process. It didn’t just start last week or last month, or even in January when the petition came forward to us.”

The residents have a right to put this on the ballot, and “I strongly support that right and am in favor of moving forward,” she said.

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