

Lakeview Commons struggles to be a reality

By Kathryn Reed

It was hard to know on Tuesday that the Lakeview Commons project in the center of South Lake Tahoe was not before the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors for the first time.

This was the fourth time in three years.



Dirt at El Dorado Beach would be replaced with paving stones if Lakeview Commons comes to fruition.

The long discussion about the 56-acre project that encompasses El Dorado Beach and Campground by the Lake sounded at times like a petty rivalry between the county and the city.

Supervisor Jim Sweeney made it known, “I believe my grandfather was part of the group that got the Board of Supervisor to buy this property.”

He has several issues with the project, though he did repeatedly say he supports the renovation of the area, if only

for environmental reasons.

The five-member board made its once annual trek to Lake Tahoe on Nov. 10. Most of the issues facing the elected body related to the eastside of the county.

At times the questions asked by the board members – four represent the West Slope, one Lake Tahoe – made it obvious Lake Tahoe is not a regular stop for them.

Supervisor Ray Nutting didn't understand how Lakeview Commons could be referred to as the "center of town" as project manager Deb Vreeland called it in her presentation.

The board had no comprehension of how well used the El Dorado Beach area is or how dilapidated it is.

Ron Briggs, chairman of the board, questioned Supervisor Norma Santiago's allegiance to the county at one point when he asked, "Who's the community?" in reference to one of her comments. Santiago is the lone voice on the board for the Lake Tahoe community. Her answer to the question was, "El Dorado County." Briggs implied her loyalties might be with South Lake Tahoe, where she lives.

South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County officials have long squabbled like children. This project – particularly the land involved, Lake Tahoe Airport, the government center on Johnson Boulevard – they are issues that crop up every so often without resolution. Listening to the elected officials it's hard to know this is one county and not two divided by a wall of granite.

The bitterness and childlike behavior between the government entities that are supposed to represent all residents carries on no matter who is in office.

Considering \$1.5 million has been spent on planning the project that will transform the lakefront area, it seemed like

it may go down the drain Tuesday.

Sweeney kept talking policy issues – which is his job. But one has to wonder where he has been. In a three-year period, 28 community meetings were conducted in South Lake Tahoe about the project. Lakeview Commons, aka the 56-acre project, had been before the Board of Supervisors three times before Tuesday and three times before the South Lake Tahoe City Council. This gave plenty of time for policy issues to be hashed out.

The project has been talked about for seven years.

On Tuesday, Sweeney kept harping on how he needed to see a real plan.

What Vreeland presented apparently didn't qualify.

Another bone of contention was the name of the project – Lakeview Commons. Most of the West Slope supervisors took issue with the name – wanting El Dorado to be part of the mix.

Those in South Lake Tahoe – agency and city reps – said the name could be changed.

Another issue Tuesday morning was the lease South Lake Tahoe has on the property owned by El Dorado County. It expires in 13 years. The California Tahoe Conservancy, which will fund the renovation on the lakeside of Highway 50, needs a 20-year agreement in place that states who will maintain the property so grants can be secured.

Officials close to the project thought it was going to be a slam dunk for the board to approve an extension on the lease. Not so.

Finally, a compromise was met.

The issue will be brought up at the Dec. 8 supervisors' meeting for the lakefront part of the project to be separated

from the rest of the plan on the other side of Highway 50.

This will allow the city to proceed the same day with entertaining a motion to go forward with the bid process so construction could begin next spring.

The board toured the site after lunch, which was provided by the South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce.

In other board action:

- Supervisors made the Happy Homestead Cemetery District a five-member board. John Poel and Joe Tillson were appointed to terms that expire in January 2013. The three current board members are seated until January 2011.
- Lahontan Water Board's presentation was postponed to Dec. 8 when the supervisors are back in Placerville. Water board representatives will also be before the South Lake Tahoe City Council that day.