

# Divided South Lake council threatens Ski Run BID future

By Kathryn Reed



Nearly one-third of the money it takes to maintain Ski Run Boulevard's landscaping and bike trail is in jeopardy of disappearing.

Every year the business improvement district that includes more than 70 businesses and property owners in this area of South Lake Tahoe must come before the City Council to renew the BID. On Tuesday it was not approved. Neither was it denied.

Councilmen Jerry Birdwell and Hal Cole recused themselves because of, respectively, owning property on the street and nearby. Because the matter involves money it necessitates the remaining three to vote in unison for the BID to go forward.

Councilman Bill Crawford abstained. Abstaining is allowed without cause or reason needing to be given.

"I am not opposed to what is going on at Ski Run. But over the years all kinds of public money was spent there," Crawford told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting. "No one bothered to talk to me about why I abstained two weeks ago so I don't know what silly game they are playing. I think we can get out of the business of having to dicker with this group every year."

The vote Crawford referenced was when the council voted to have it on this week's agenda, which was not a monetary issue.

It was agreed Tuesday that the issue would be brought up at the next council meeting – June 1.

Brian Des Rochers and Barbara Tenney, both board members of the Ski Run BID, spoke at the meeting. They have a commitment from Crawford to sit down in the coming days to get his view on the matter.

“It wasn’t quite what we anticipated. It definitely was shocking,” Des Rochers said of the vote after the meeting.

Nonetheless, Des Rochers said the businesses would continue with the On the Run theme, events like Saturday’s cleanup day, the June 5 bike festival and parade, and the third Thursday night of the month for live music starting June 17.

The reality is the money allocated to the BID that is threatened was for landscape maintenance, not for marketing and events.

If the allocation is not approved by the council, that body will have to decide if finding the money in the general fund to maintain Ski Run, partial funding or letting it turn into something like the weeds along Linear Park on Highway 50 will be the option. (The latter keeps happening even though the now defunct Core 24 Charities helped get a water line put in by Tahoe Meadows for irrigation and gave the city \$20,000 to beautify the area, which hasn’t happened.)

Redevelopment money (\$5,000 this fiscal year) has been used to pay for a consultant to run meetings, fly her in and put her up in a hotel. It’s not known why one of the lodging facilities on the boulevard didn’t offer a free room. Money also went to pay for meeting spaces – all were on the boulevard.

“(Redevelopment funds) can’t pay for ongoing maintenance, but they can be used to help stimulate new business development,” explained Gene Palazzo, who heads the city’s Redevelopment

Agency. "They need some seed money to get things going. Redevelopment can help with that."

The BID has requested another \$5,000 for this fiscal year that would be spent on nonprofit incorporation fees, a website and newsletter startup costs. Because those dollars were wrapped into Tuesday's entire BID proposal, they will not be forthcoming at this point.

The city's Parks and Recreation Department oversee maintenance of the boulevard between Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail. (The marina side is not in the BID.)

Parks Director Gary Moore said for fiscal year 2010-11 it is projected to cost \$29,900 to maintain that stretch of the city.

**The money would go to:**

- \$11,800 – landscaping. This includes fixing sprinklers, mowing, edging, replacing dead trees or trimming broken limbs.
- \$5,300 – water. There is a meter on each end of the boulevard.
- \$4,600 – electricity. There are 80 light standards. (With LED lights being provided by a state grant, that cost is likely to come down in future years.)
- \$4,000 – bike trail maintenance. One mile of pavement is on each side of the road.
- \$4,200 – light maintenance. More than 20 bulbs are replaced each year, and ballasts need repair.

**The money would come from:**

- \$11,300 – BID. The property owners pay \$2 per linear foot of frontage on Ski Run. Businesses are assessed a percentage of their gross income. All of this is collected in July via

business license renewals.

- \$10,000 – Measure S. Each mile of bike trail receives \$5,000 for maintenance. An exception by Measure S overseers allows this money to be used on lighting issues with the theory being the bike trail is used at night by cyclists.
- \$8,600 – Parks and Recreation general fund.

The BID collected \$10,500 for the 2009-10 fiscal year that ends Sept. 30. This means the maintenance for the boulevard should not be in jeopardy this summer. But it's not known for certain.

Finance Director Christine Vuletich said in an email response to a phone message that she could answer questions today about the issue – but that didn't work for *Lake Tahoe News'* deadline.

The question to her would have been: With the money collected based on a July 1-June 30 fiscal year per business license fees and the city on an Oct. 1-Sept. 30 fiscal year, is the money collected for the BID divided between two fiscal years or used solely in what would be an upcoming fiscal year?

The money collected for and by the BID members is essentially a self-tax. That is why Mayor Kathay Lovell does not understand Crawford's reluctance to continue on with the 7-year-old BID.

"To me it's a no-brainer. It doesn't cost us anything," Lovell said.

No one in the BID's jurisdiction protested the assessment.

It's possible the BID members could collect the fee themselves. But the money would not have to go to landscaping. They could use it all on marketing, promotions and/or events.

This means the city would still be left with the decision as

to what to do about landscaping on Ski Run Boulevard. When the California Tahoe Conservancy put up \$1.5 million for the bike trail, lights, curb and gutter the deal was the city would maintain it all. This means with a BID the people on the street pay for it and without a BID it will most likely come out of the general fund – which means other locations in the city could see fewer dollars.