

South Tahoe blasts county for being uncooperative



Dear Publisher,

Many of us are working collaboratively on the development of a regional prosperity plan for the Lake Tahoe Basin that calls for good green economic planning and collaboration among government, private-sector organizations and the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce. It is a remarkable planning effort that requires tools and strategies at the local level to make it all happen. Isn't it a shame that city government now has to respond to threats of costly lawsuits from El Dorado County, when we should be meeting and discussing ways to resolve outstanding differences of opinion?

The City Council received a letter from El Dorado County Board of Supervisors signed by Board Chairman Norma Santiago threatening the city of South Lake Tahoe with a lawsuit if the City Council does not immediately revoke the ordinance adopting RDA Project Area No. 2 and make other concessions to county government. The letter is being carefully reviewed by me, the city attorney, and staff and it will be brought to the City Council shortly for review and action.

As a resident of South Lake Tahoe and city manager, I would have hoped for our district county supervisor and our county government to support our efforts to improve our community and economy. The Tahoe region and people and businesses inside South Lake Tahoe are suffering [17.8 percent unemployment in the city limits] I would hope and expect county government to

be collaborative and cooperative partners who demonstrate through their actions that they care about the 24,000 residents and many business owners and operators here, and they are supportive of efforts to improve our local economy. From the beginning of my tenure here eight years ago, I have heard city residents and business owners and operators complain that county elected leaders have not always demonstrated by their actions that they share the concerns we have about the future of our community. They cite as examples the following El Dorado County actions:

1. Dropping a lawsuit on the Shingle Springs Casino [Red Hawk] and then telling our community that a new casino would have no adverse economic impact on the South Shore;

2. Denying a request of the City Council to meet with county elected leadership to discuss the transfer of the county courthouse to the state even though the agreement with the county for the use of the city property requires City Council approval before any transfer can legally occur;

3. Denying a request by the city on behalf of the city and county to accept a federal grant of \$1.4 million to bring money into the city and county to forestall foreclosures and help to stabilize the housing market. The board rejected the grant and cooperative effort even though the county would have received most of the funds and county residents most of the benefits:

4. Having a prominent long-time county supervisor in another district say in both private and public that he doesn't want the county paying for services to city and county residents in the city's District V because our high unemployment costs the county too much money. He suggests forming a new county and ridding El Dorado County of us.

5. Being perceived to treat the South Shore officials and local trade organizations in their rhetoric as second-class

citizens.

There is tremendous support in the city and Tahoe region to improve the economy, and collaborative efforts are underway both inside the city and with our regional economic prosperity partners. Residents and business owners want a strong and viable local economy. In the city, as demonstrated in the December 2008 Community Survey, town-hall meetings on Redevelopment Project Area No. 2 [RDA] and at RDA No. 2 hearings before the City Council and Planning Commission, the people want steps take to support economic growth, see capital improvements made to their community without more taxes on the people, support workforce housing, and see new private-sector investment that creates good jobs. Doing nothing is not an option. I want and I think most people who live and work here want a county supervisor and county government to support our economic improvement efforts and be real partners and supporters of economic growth using the best tool we have in South Lake Tahoe to do so in this complicated, expensive, and heavily government-regulated area known as the Tahoe Region. If we had a strong local economy and put local people back to work the County would benefits ... everyone wins.

The City Council and city staff gave county government every opportunity to comment and engage in conversation with the city on the formation of RDA No. 2 beginning in 2009. The preparation of a Redevelopment Plan for RDA No. 2 has not been a secret and a matter of public discussion for several years. City staff presented the proposed RDA No. 2 plan before the Board of Supervisors earlier this year. The county sat on its proverbial hands for many months until the last minute and then demanded changes in the plan. Even then, the City Council graciously acquiesced and initially reduced the size of the proposed RDA No. 2 project area as a concession to county demands only to have the County continue to oppose the plan and want more concessions. Even after adoption of the RDA Project Area No. 2 Plan, city officials offered to continue

dialogue with the county [June 7 letter to the county administrative officer, June 17 email to Supervisor Santiago] and the county was silent up until now when they demand revocation of the RDA No. 2 ordinance recently passed by the City Council.

County government officials should have followed the example of our colleagues at STPUD who originally had serious objections to RDA No. 2 but continued dialogue with City officials on ways to overcome their objections. We are very close to an agreement with STPUD as a result of our continuing dialogue and an agreement will be reached. STPUD officials have been respectful, courteous, engaged and acted responsibly and reasonably.

I believe that city officials and residents want a cooperative and collaborative elected County government leadership who cares about the 24,000 people who live here and is willing to work with and support efforts of City government to improve our economy. When we improve our economy, everyone [city and county] benefits. Sadly, the county is opposed to a new RDA Project Area No. 2 because of their abnormal fear of losing future property tax revenue. If we don't do the right things now in the South Shore to grow the economy, we will not have new property tax revenues in the future to meet city or county needs.

Getting along with county government is fine and a noble and productive goal as long as it results in the needs of the residents of South Lake Tahoe and the South Shore being met. We need to communicate, collaborate and cooperate with county government without threats and intimidation and the city will certainly engage in meaningful dialogue.

Dave Jinkens, South Lake Tahoe city manager