

Opinion: A plan to get locals back to work

By Steve Kubby

South Lake Tahoe is in the middle of an economic catastrophe. Unemployment is above 20 percent. Our construction industry is in collapse.

We need immediate action to create jobs in our struggling community.



We have thousands of homeowners and businesses who desperately want to make property repairs and improvements. People want to renovate or expand their homes and businesses yesterday, if not sooner. There is such pent up demand for construction, it's ready to burst like a dam and flood South Lake Tahoe with jobs and money.

But this can't happen with today's system.

Our city needs a simple and timely process to get building permits. Once we find a way all the pent up construction work can be authorized, we can unleash a flood of new construction jobs.

There is a catch. There's no way to get from here to there without taking on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and their mountain of red tape, bureaucratic delays, excessive fees and job-killing inefficiency.

I propose an emergency three-part plan to get our contractors, carpenters, plumbers, and electricians back to work. This is not rocket science. Our City Council must simplify and speed up the process of obtaining a building permit.

Here's how it would work:

1. The city of South Lake Tahoe must exercise its constitutional authority, as an incorporated city with elected officials, to issue its own building permits. The permit process should have a two-week approval deadline – if you haven't received your permit or an explanation for rejection (with the steps needed to get approval) in ten business days, approval should be automatic.

2. In lieu of the current TRPA fees, our city could collect permit fees no greater than half the TRPA charges. All revenues exceeding permit expenses will be held in reserve. The city will create a multi-million dollar legal defense fund in case we have to take TRPA on in court.

3. Any litigation against points one and two above would have to be initiated by TRPA, not the council. We would simply be exercising our constitutional authority as a City government. Since the burden of proof would be on the TRPA, this should be very expensive for them.

All of this can and should be avoided with a simple memorandum of understanding between South Lake Tahoe and TRPA. On the other hand, we need to be prepared to win in court, if TRPA refuses to be reasonable.

Of course the TRPA could always red tag construction. If that happens, you could just let our city attorney know about it and he would be authorized to handle the matter at the city's expense. Our police and city staff will be instructed to ignore any TRPA citations. We have the constitutional authority to do these things and if the TRPA thinks otherwise, they'll find themselves in an expensive and difficult tenth amendment battle they can't win.

As George Washington famously reminds us, "Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force. Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master."

Tahoe residents know all too well the dangers of a fire raging out of control. Our city is in political flames that have cost us dearly. We let government get out of hand, burning a hole in the heart of downtown.

The time has come for the City Council to stop serving as a TRPA lapdog. Instead, our City Council must become a vigilant guard dog, ready to defend us from any further interference or harassment by the TRPA.

Let's bypass TRPA and give homeowners and businesses the opportunity to make reasonable repairs and improvements to their property. Once we open up the process of obtaining building permits, we'll automatically put our contractors, carpenters, plumbers and electricians back to work.

In less than a month we could be back on our feet with a booming construction industry with a fresh influx of money for our now struggling community.

Right here in South Lake Tahoe, let us redefine politics in a revolutionary return to common sense and smaller government. Let's return power to our local community and restore our constitutional rights. Government should be our servant, not our master.

Steve Kubby is running for South Lake Tahoe City Council.