

Opinion: Community spirit needed to move Tahoe forward

By Garry Bowen

In the last article written, “Entrepreneurial Spirit Needs to Resurface to Save Tahoe” (Oct. 3, Voices), the seeming focus was on the “glory days”, as one respondent described my take on what made South Lake Tahoe’s economy so vital in the late 1950s and, in particular, the entire ’60s. Another derided the idea of “living in the past”, which only reminded me nostalgically that the “glory days” were in fact long gone.

Does that then mean that entrepreneurial spirit has no place in Tahoe ever again?

Well, if you would be kind enough to notice, that review of business entrepreneurial skill was necessary in order to put in appropriate perspective the idea that there is another kind of entrepreneurial spirit to consider when thinking of Tahoe’s future.



Garry Bowen

Civic entrepreneurship is the form needed to beckon business entrepreneurs to town in ever-increasing numbers; as the civic function will have to be awakened to adequately attract those who want to make a life here. In a very real sense, another community spirit will have to emerge based on a necessary but contemporary paradigm shift: that of sustainable economic

development.

The new, but already highly-touted Prosperity Plan is in many ways our newest flavor of the month – similar to the description above, in that there are already folks positioning themselves to play heroic roles in its inception without even noticing that by its very creation the current gap is now actually wider than before doing it. We are once again ill equipped to proactively go forward.

The infrastructure now needed to realize balance is Redevelopment Area 2, with the prudent set-aside of funding to get it off the ground, so to speak, but the progenitors of such directions are beset by the influence of the Peter Principle. The marketing /promotional folks all seem to be champing at the bit to reinvent the town without a proper sense of what they have to work with.

Geotourism – everything from Apple Hill to Fannette Island to Vikingsholm to the Flume Trail to the earlier America's Most Beautiful Playground campaign are, in one form or the other, already here or have been. Why haven't they been considered as an attractive package before now?

As a matter of fact, now that it's mentioned, they've all been here forever.

So, what is missing?

The Prosperity Plan has three clusters, two of which are geared to sustainable economic development: green building and sustainability, not to mention that health and wellness are also in that category by default. Given the difficulty of the electorate's ability to embrace TRPA's internal desire to make a shift which includes transect zoning's rightful place in sustainable economic development, (even though, for their part, TRPA have not even been administering Dr. Robert Bailey's IPES scoring the way he envisioned it) then the burden of "half-fast" thinking will still encumber us, in not

fully realizing what we are working with – to make a point, the group paid to create a prosperity plan will move on, while sleeping dogs continue to lie.

The new reality in the world, which fortunately can embrace Tahoe's need to renew itself, is actually of the same dimension as that of all environmental care and concerns in a sustainable way: develop in a way that is simply and completely conducive to life. This is fundamental to sustainable development: reduce the error of our ways, thereby reducing the very costs associated with those errors, inevitably leading to more "found" money. Simple, elegant, and profound are all prerequisites that may be necessary to meet Tahoe's looming imperatives.

Or, in the words of Leonardo Da Vinci: "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." Why complicate everything all the time?

Sustainable economic development can also, for Lake Tahoe's immediate future prospects, be thought of as the ultimate civic engagement process, along with the actual and pragmatic realization that we are all in this together. We all recognize the tremendous need to change, but are always either jockeying for position to control it, or finding ways (ego or hubris) to argue about how to go about it. Both of these ways are unsustainable. Our direction, as now being portrayed, will continue to be ecotistic.

Lake Tahoe News prefaced the query of City Council candidates with a question about "being like Whistler". Being like Whistler is a great standard, as this writer can easily testify, having participated with the folks there 10 years ago, at the time of their Olympic bid, but even that standard can be surpassed by considering Tahoe's rebirth as the ultimate civic engagement project. We deserve no less but only if we work smarter.

As literally everyone is supportive of clean air, clean water, good health, reduced costs, and “better bang for the buck”, then a sustainable economic development framework has something for all in the “new and improved” sense, in the same way that Whistler has exported their framework experience to literally hundreds of municipalities across Canada. Even the U.N. noticed.

In the classically facetious sense, it is not “rocket science”, but as it is founded on the only irrefutable science we have, the Laws of Thermodynamics, it immediately satisfies the powers-that-be need to make all decisions scientifically-based. In fact, decisions elsewhere based on this framework have resulted in being able to plan over 100 year time spans, versus 20 years which become 23, 24, 25 due to the conflicted nature of the goals. Global decisions on local levels (the bumper sticker of yore) – a pragmatic and sustainable concept if ever there was one.

Harvard University, whose Kennedy School of Government I’ve been working with on civic engagement issues for over a year, gleaning insight about the issues rampant in my own hometown, recently concluded, in a draft paper, that all across America the main issue is, at No. 1, stalled progress.

This indicates that Lake Tahoe needn’t feel guilty, or uptight, about its current status – we just need more awareness of how to fill the wider gap created by the Prosperity Plan, so we don’t end up falling into it (as the void that it is now) in the same way that the community spirit fell into “Ta-hole”, BlueGo, and now Lakeview Commons. And then move forward to a greater destiny.

Creativity, innovation, and civic entrepreneurship will come, but Tahoe will need to learn better how to put the horse before the cart. The only known antidote to the Peter Principle is re-education – not a bad solution in a world that, from now on, will require lifelong learning. That will

be better founded on a strong sustainable orientation. It is great to be able to do the right thing, but it is even more important to do the thing right. Set the proper foundation, have the patience to do it right, and then, success for posterity, full of prosperity – for people and the planet.

Garry Bowen has a 50-year connection to the South Shore, with an immediate past devoted to global sustainability, on most of its current fronts: green building, energy and water efficiencies, and public health. He's also in the process of planning with his classmates their 50-year South Tahoe High reunion. He may be reached at tahoefuture@gmail.com or (775) 690.6900.