

South Tahoe attempting to fix parking nightmares

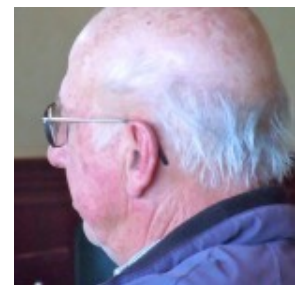
By Kathryn Reed

Parking in South Lake Tahoe is atrocious. No one disagreed. And all loosely agreed solving the problems will take creative thinking, and recognizing the various sections of town are not all the same when it comes to use and traffic patterns.

About 30 people, mostly property and business owners, gathered at Riva Grill for about two hours Thursday afternoon to talk about how better to serve their driving customers – which is the bulk of people.

Despite years of planners saying the future would see people using their cars less, that theory has never been realized.

“People are going to drive their cars to get where they want to go. That is not going to change,” John Cefalu said.



John Cefalu

Cefalu has lived here for decades and has property in multiple locations along Highway 50.

One of his concerns is where people are going to park once Lakeview Commons is finished. He gave a bit of history how there was a time when people could park on the highway. Caltrans finally stopped that practice, which is how Harrison Avenue was created as a frontage road.

Property owners in the area have not been able to agree on a

plan that the city wants to develop to alleviate congestion and making parking less nightmarish. Cefalu said an idea to create one-way streets had traction with owners, which could help with parking.

A meeting the evening of Oct. 21 was for the public to express what they would like to see. Only one member of the public showed up. (The National League Championship Series with the San Francisco Giants was at the same time.)

The areas of focus covered in the grant are Ski Run Boulevard and Harrison Avenue. But the consultants doing the work are also looking at the Stateline area.

A \$30,000 grant from the state's Community Development Block Grant program is paying for a team from Kimley-Horn and Associates, which has offices throughout the country including Reno, to create a plan to improve the situation.

The underlying focus is economic development. Without parking that works, people may not frequent a business. With the lousy reputation the Heavenly Village debt-ridden city-owned garage has year-round and the paid Ski Run Marina lot has during the summer, locals in particular stay away from those areas.

Those gathered want to work on changing public perception.



Business
and
property
owners on
Oct. 21
discuss
parking in

South
Tahoe.
Photos/Kath
ryn Reed

Janis Rhodes and Brett Wood of the consulting firm are tasked with gathering the information and coming up with solutions by early summer. How to pay for whatever changes might be proposed will be an issue tackled when the ideas come to light.

“They must deliver solutions to the parking problem that the city can deliver,” Nancy Kerry, the city’s housing-redevelopment manager, told *Lake Tahoe News* before the meeting. “We know parking is an issue.”

Metered street parking, parking garages, reconfiguring streets, changing public perception about paid parking, paying attention to public transit-walkers-cyclists, and approving future projects with adequate parking were all broached in the daytime meeting.

Most in the audience agreed more parking and paid parking are likely to be more prevalent in South Tahoe in the near future. And they agreed it would be the locals, who are used to free parking, who will probably be the hardest to convince this is what’s needed.

The consultants started work in July by speaking with nearly 300 people to gather their thoughts on parking in the city. They also have read the 10 or so parking studies the city has commissioned over the years.

In the in-person survey, which mostly tourists answered, about 70 percent said they would be willing to pay for parking.

Another survey is being conducted online through at least the end of the year.

This is another opportunity for locals and tourists to weigh-

in on parking in town and help direct change.

“During summer we spend more time turning people away than parking them,” Riva Grill manager Scott Craig told the group.

He and others wouldn't mind a multi-story parking garage to be built to accommodate people.

When the Ski Run Marina project was approved parking was inadequate. It's worse now that businesses occupy the commercial area and Tahoe Queen has multiple cruises nearly daily, but always in the summer.

“At least 150 people, if not more, work in this area. That's the same number of parking spots,” said Mansoor Alyeshmerni, owner of Ski Run Marina.

When the city and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency approved the marina development the powers that be touted an integrated bus system for the South Shore, but that reality is teetering in and out of bankruptcy court; and despite all the planning for bike trails, asphalt is the missing component to make that real.

Still, Lisa O'Daly with the California Tahoe Conservancy asked if business owners have noticed more people walking or cycling on trails that her agency has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on – mostly in planning.

Brian Des Rochers, president of the Ski Run BID, said he does see people using the sidewalks on the boulevard.

Wood, the consultant, said in the online surveys that have been completed a number of people have commented on how this is not a walking town.

Cefalu brought up how his Fox gas station plows its sidewalks, but he can't get neighboring businesses to do the same.

This all tied into a discussion about the tourists' experience

when they are in town – the ability to walk, contend with traffic and park.